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CONTENTS

Spring 2023

4 **The Magician** *by Gillian Walsh*
9 **Editor's Letter**
10 **Cornucopia** *Have you gone goblin mode, an entrepreneur thwarted and other goings on*
16 **Historic Homes of England**
Dominique Corlett visits Leighton House
21 **The Prime Ministers**
George Grenville by Andrew Shaw
24 **Made in England**
Katherine Sorrell on the art of decorative plaster
27 **In Praise of Modern Britain**
April Fool's jokes are inventive, says Brian Viner
28 **A New Royal Era**
A profile of King Charles III, by Paul James
32 **Coronation Day**
Paul James on the traditions around the crowning
34 **Staying Power**
Susan Buchanan on Rossetti's favourite muse
38 **Explore England**
The splendour of historic York, by Mairi Hughes
43 **Great Britons**
Sir Christopher Wren, by Paul Bloomfield
46 **Post Box**
50 **Riding High**
William Gibson meets side-saddler Clare Barnett
52 **The Home of Snooker**
Dene Bebbington recalls some thrilling matches
54 **An English Brew Through and Through**
England's first tea estate, by John Greeves
57 **Taking Tea** *A history by Jan Johnstone*
58 **Digging Deep**
The story of the Great Escape, by Amanda Hodges
61 **Postal Progress**
Eleanor Doughty on the new postage stamps
62 **Forget-me-Nots**
Roy Hampson remembers his trips to the barber
64 **Roaring Ladies and Wicked Girls**
England's daring highwaywomen, by Lin Bensley
66 **Hidden Gardens of England**
Catherine Larner on some horticultural gems
70 **Heritage Church: Greensted Church, Essex**
The world's oldest wooden church, by Chris Franks
73 **Trees of England: the hornbeam**
74 **Poets' Corner and Poet of the Past**
76 **My England: The Duchess of Rutland**
78 **Gardener's Notes** *by Juliet Roberts*
80 **The Bookshelf**
84 **Spring Diary**
100 **Late Thaw** *by David Fleming*

Front cover: York in late spring. For York feature see page 38
Image: Alamy

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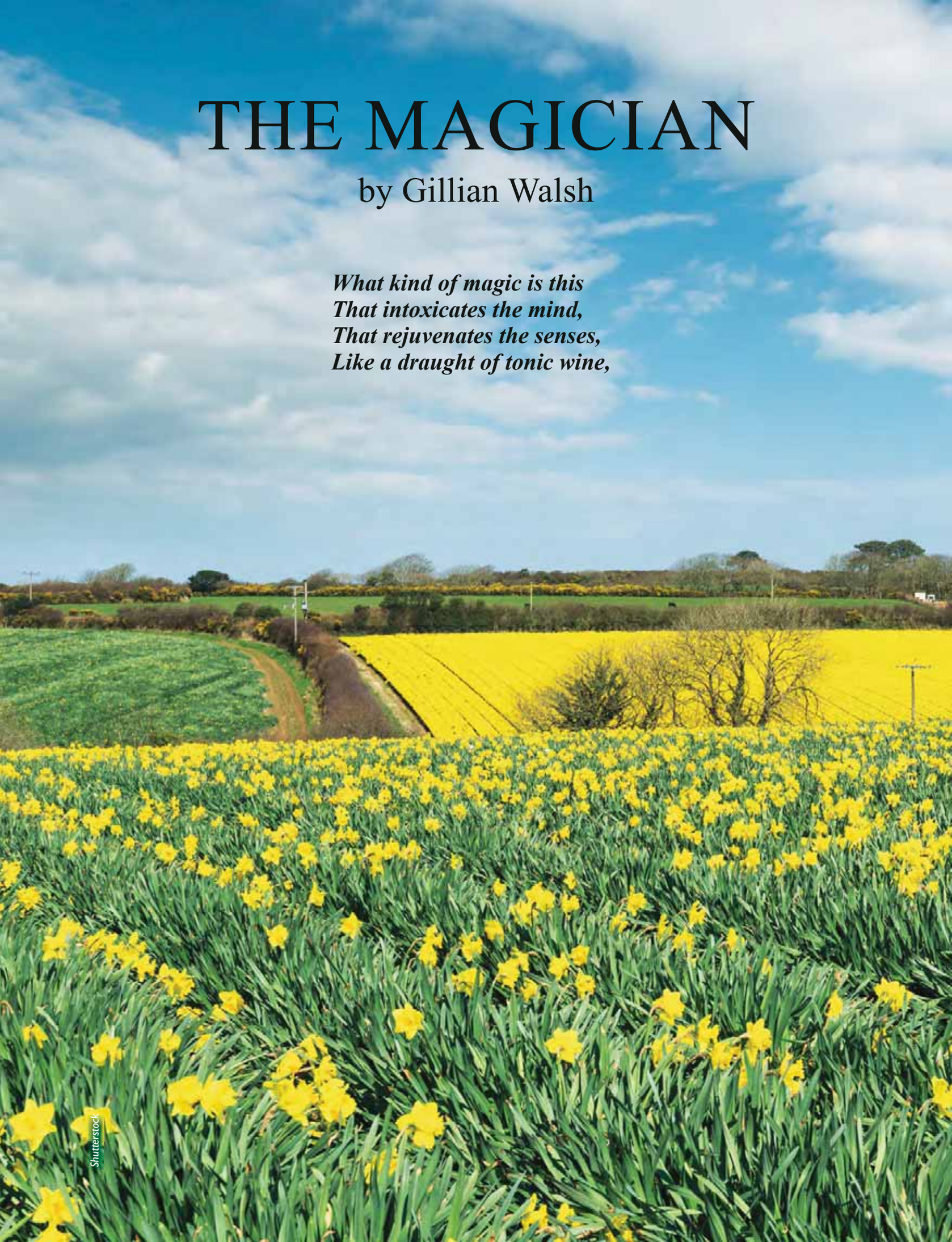
THE MAGICIAN

by Gillian Walsh

What kind of magic is this
That intoxicates the mind,
That rejuvenates the senses,
Like a draught of tonic wine,



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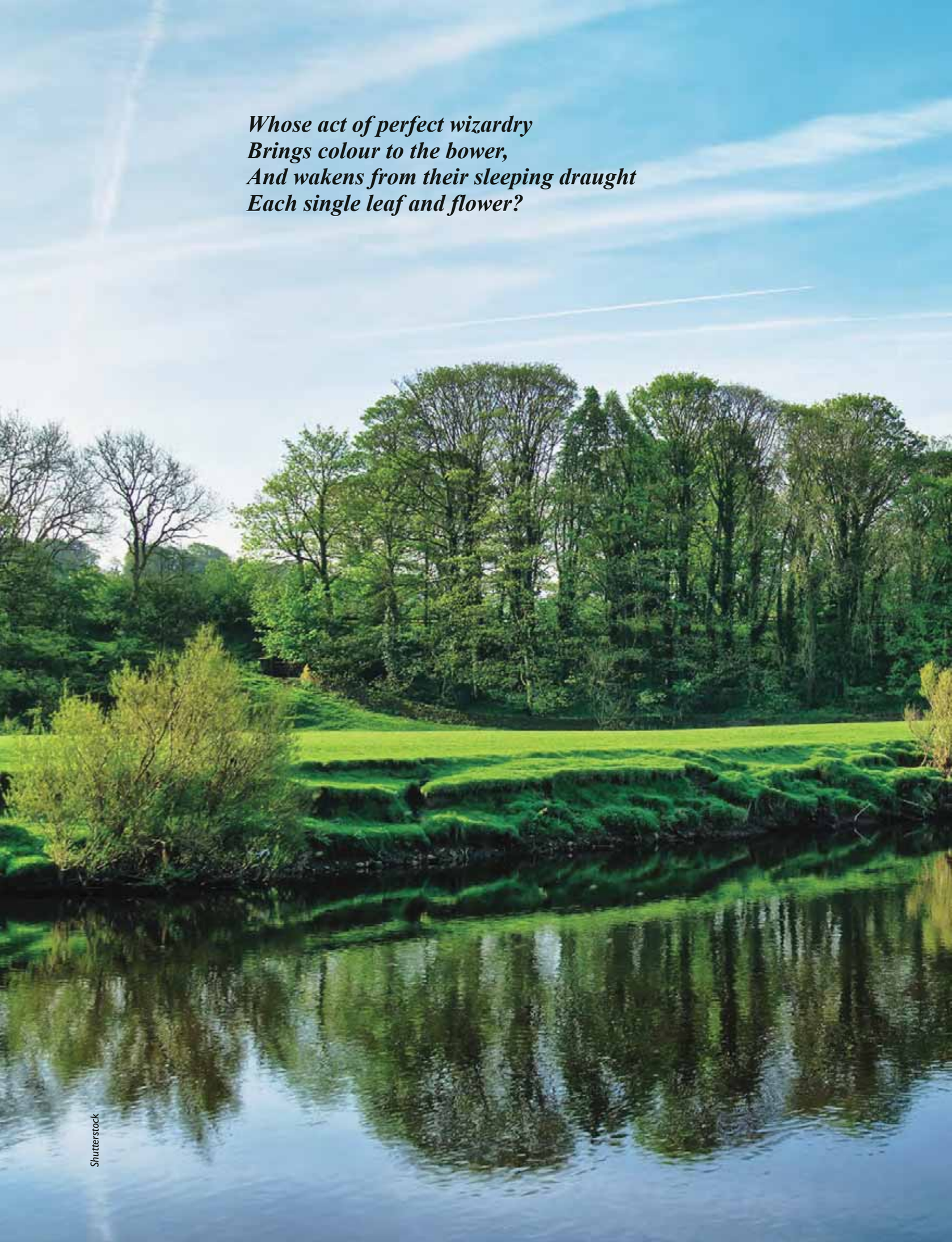
Whose hand adept at conjuring
Bids all the robins sing,
Transports the soul to dizzy heights,
And gives the heart its wings?

Fields of daffodils growing near Helston in Cornwall

Whose act of perfect wizardry
Brings colour to the bower,
And wakens from their sleeping draught
Each single leaf and flower?



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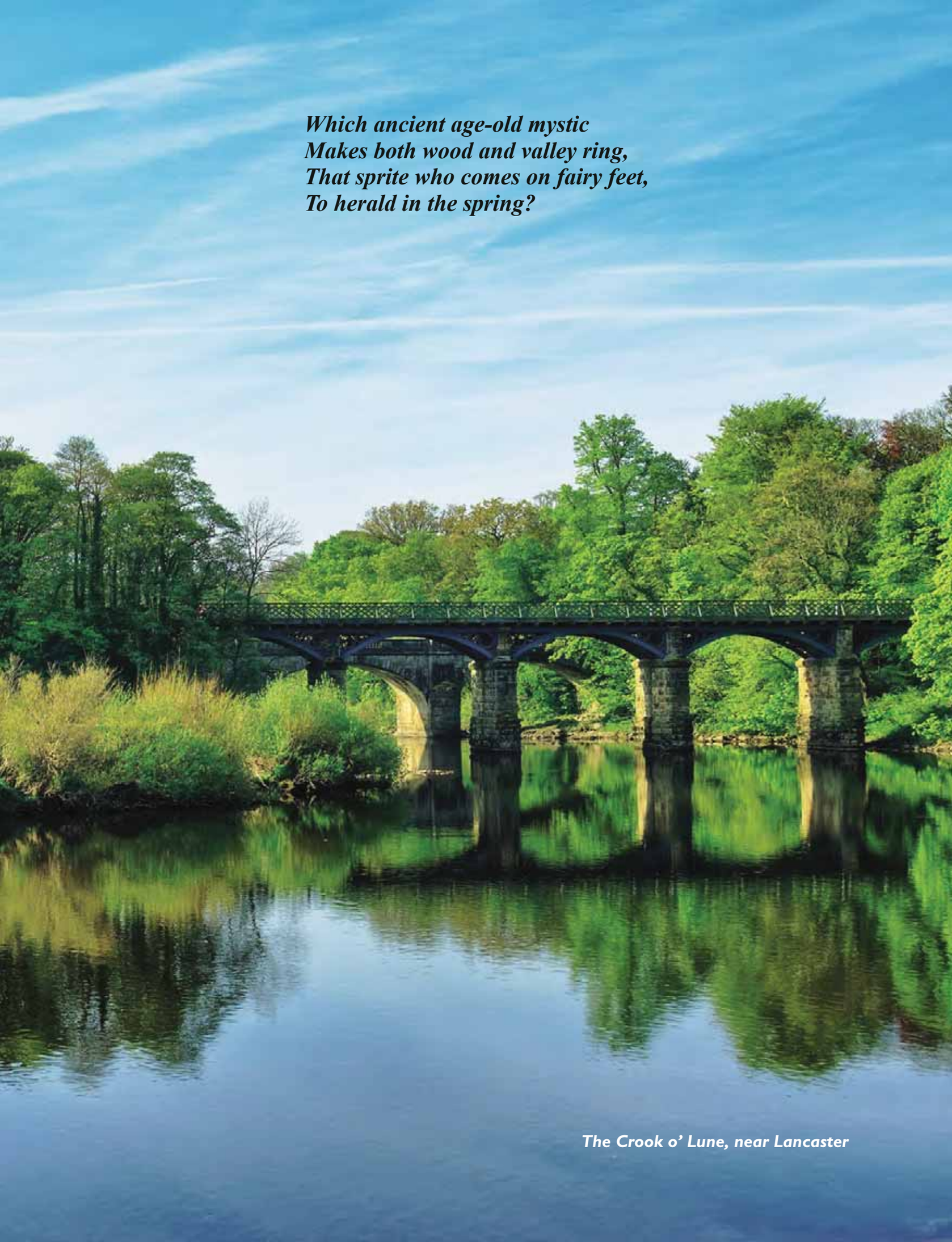
Which ancient age-old mystic
Makes both wood and valley ring,
That sprite who comes on fairy feet,
To herald in the spring?



The Crook o' Lune, near Lancaster

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Welcome

. . . to our first issue of 2023, and may the rest of the year ahead be absolutely terrific for you all.

Having been the editor of *This England* since 2018, it feels like every year to date has brought a turbulent and escalating level of disruption, not least 2022 (ironically when we were supposed to be getting back to normal), with our three PMs, four Chancellors of the Exchequer (in four months), a war and the very sad death of HM the Queen. This year, it goes without saying I'd love a calmer one with no drama, no leadership contests, just the country getting on with what it does well and improving what it could do better – and goodness knows that's quite a long list at the moment.

Anyway, we have a cheery spring issue that tells the many stories of people getting on with things that they do really well – a gratifying source of inspiration. First off, we take you to Cornwall where Britain's first tea plantation was set up just before the millennium. Who knew that the conditions that allow that harbinger of spring, the camellia, to flourish also suit the growing of tea, and very prolifically, too. An experiment that started in 1999 with a few hundred tea bushes is now a thriving business that produces hundreds of tons of tea a year, from bushes that will last a further 400-500 years. They even have a "teabot" to pick the leaves. It's a great read and, alongside, we trace the history of the English love affair with tea.

Also fascinating is the story of side saddler Clare Barnett, one of the few remaining side-saddle makers in the country, who is enjoying a healthy growth in demand for her hand-made saddles as more people are reverting to this traditional way to ride. Another company keeping tradition alive is George Jackson plasterwork, which has been designing and making ornate decoration in plaster for some of our most impressive buildings for more than two centuries now. Again, it's an entrepreneurial tale of a couple making their way today.

We all have the coronation to look forward to on 6 May. Will you be going? Will you be lining the streets? Will you be celebrating? Do you remember Elizabeth II's coronation? Paul James outlines what we can expect on the day and where it might differ from coronations of the past. But before that, he has written a fascinating profile of Charles III and there's plenty in there that perhaps you don't know already. As the coronation falls after our next issue goes to press, you can follow us on Facebook for updates.

We have plenty more, too, from Mairi Hughes's travel feature on York to the fascinating story of Fanny Cornforth, long-term muse of Rossetti, whose work will be on display at a blockbuster exhibition at the Tate Britain this spring. Chris Franks visits the world's oldest wooden church in Essex, and we have some very enticing gardens to visit.

Enjoy the issue!

Angela

Angela Linforth, Editor.

CONTRIBUTORS

Roy Hampson

Yorkshire native Roy has been telling the stories of the county and its people since the mid 1970s when his photographs and words were first published in regional magazines.
In Forget-me-nots on p62, Roy meets Mr David Grice, a traditional barber in Wakefield, and recalls his own trips as a boy to the local barber for a "short back and sides".

Dominique Corlett

For our Historic Home on p16, lifestyle and interiors journalist Dominique visits Leighton House. With its opulent interiors and unusual history this was the ideal commission for Dominique, who was bowled over by Leighton's vision and the wealth of Iznik tiles and pottery. We wish Dominique, who has been our acting features editor for the last year, all the best for her return to freelance writing in 2023, and hope to see her work in *This England* again soon.

CORNUCOPIA

A collection of English customs, curiosities, forgotten stories and unusual happenings

CRUELTY-FREE BY ROYAL DECREE

As Prince of Wales, Charles was well known for supporting high welfare standards in farming. Now he's sticking to his principles, with a letter to animal rights campaigners assuring them that there will be no foie gras – which is made from duck or goose liver – served at royal dining tables.

The King's correspondence with the PETA campaign group in reply to their query about the Palace's policy on foie gras, confirmed that the controversial foodstuff, made by force-feeding the birds so that their livers enlarge, is banned across all royal households and residences. Charles first banned foie gras,which is illegal to produce in this country, but can be imported, in his own residences in 2008.

PETA showed appreciation of the King's stance by sending him a hamper of meat-free "faux gras" made by vegan restaurateur and chef Alexis Gauthier. It has not been reported whether this plant-based version was to the King's liking. Could we be about to have our first vegan monarch, perhaps? How very on-trend that would be!

The King likes happy geese

THE WORD ON THE STREET

As 2022 drew to an end in a flurry of strikes, political turmoil and an on-going cost of living crisis, the word chosen by dictionary publishers Collins as their "word of the year" seemed particularly appropriate. "Permacrisis", appearing for the first time last year, beat off other topical contenders including "partygate", "warm bank" and "quiet quitting", with a definition of "an extended period of instability and insecurity".

Over at Oxford, their word or expression of the year was "goblin mode". Definition: "a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations." Used as in, "I won't be joining you this weekend as I'm in goblin mode."

According to Oxford Languages, publisher of the OED, the term gained popularity following the pandemic as people emerged from lockdowns without the will or energy to return to pre-pandemic levels of effort and aspiration.

This was the first year that voting for the winning word was opened up to the public from a shortlist that also included "metaverse" and "#Istandwith". Casper Grathwohl, president of Oxford Languages said, "Given the year we've just experienced, 'goblin mode' resonates with all of us who are feeling a little overwhelmed at this point."

Previous words of the year have turned out to be powerful reminders of the preoccupations of those times. In 2021 "vax" was Oxford's top word following the rise of the Coronavirus vaccine, while "NFT" [Non-Fungible Token] came out top at Collins. Collins' 2020 winner was "lockdown", while so many options emerged for Oxford that it was unable to pick just one. In the end, "lockdown", "bushfires", "COVID-19", "Black Lives Matter", "WFH" [working from home], "keyworkers" and "furlough" were all given equal status in recognition of a uniquely challenging year.

For any of our readers feeling despondent about living in a "goblin-mode permacrisis", we would urge them not to despair and humbly offer a reminder from history that times have always been challenging in one way or another. Take the era of our Great Briton, Sir Christopher Wren (p43), who witnessed the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I, the Great Plague and the Fire of London, when no-doubt "civil war", "execution", "plague" and "fire" were all contenders for words of the year.

Did 2022 put you in goblin mode?

A HORSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Many thanks to our eagle-eyed readers who were quick to point out a caption error in the winter issue of *This England*. Due to a labelling mistake at the picture library, the image we used on our Forget-me-Nots feature (p61) was not of Suffolk Punches as stated, but of an entirely different breed. We would particularly like to thank reader Nina Irma, who went to great pains to educate us as to the characteristics of a Suffolk Punch by providing this lovely picture. Thank you, Nina!

BRIDGE OF FOOLS

We all love an end of year Top Ten, whether it's for films, albums, or most highly-paid footballers. But none can compare to the new favourite in the *This England* office: 2022's Top Ten most-bashed road bridges of Britain. What the Network-Rail-produced ranking lacks in glamour, it more than makes up for it with the sheer unusualness of the subject matter.

Who put that bridge there?

There were 1,833 incidents in Britain last year involving drivers of high-sided vehicles crashing into a bridge too low for them to clear. The delays caused by these crashes cost Network Rail £12 million in compensation payouts to rail passengers. So, the top ten in reverse order:

10. Coddenham Road Bridge, Suffolk: *10 strikes*

9. St John's Street Bridge, Lichfield, Staffordshire: *11 strikes*

Joint **8, 7, 6, 5.** Harefield Road Bridge, West Ruislip; Station Road Bridge, Berkswell, near Coventry; Station Road Bridge, Langley, Berkshire and Stuntney Road Bridge, Ely, Cambridgeshire: *12 strikes*

4. Abbey Farm, Thetford, Norfolk: *15 strikes*

3. Harlaxton Road Bridge, Grantham, Lincolnshire: *17 strikes*

2. Lower Downs Road Bridge, Wimbledon, London: *18 strikes*

1. With a massive *33 strikes* . . . Stonea Road Bridge, Manea, Cambridgeshire

What the list fails to explain is what on earth was going through the drivers' minds when they decided to plough on and hope for the best rather than checking the height of their vehicle. We invite suggestions to the usual address.

A FACE WASH WITH ST GEORGE

Be it Morris dancing, jousting or wearing a red rose in your lapel, there are many jolly ways to celebrate our patron saint come 23 April. Other countries with whom we share St George have quirky customs to rival our own, too.

Believing the Saint blesses the morning dew on his feast day, Bulgarians venture out and wash their faces with it, while in Catalonia, Spain, lovers exchange roses and books. In Albania, revellers light bonfires and dance around them – though it's on 6 May.

However you choose to celebrate here are three of the biggest and best events planned for this year:

St George's Feast: Celebrate in Trafalgar Square with performances, music and markets. Westminster WC2N 5DN; london.gov.uk

St George's Festival: Jousting, archery, sword school – English Heritage leads the activities. Wrest Park, Beds MR45 4HR; www.english-heritage.org.uk

St George's Day Parade: There were calls for the day to be made a bank holiday after the parade last year which featured military vehicles, brass bands and a Winston Churchill impersonator! Miles Platting, Manchester, manchester.gov.uk

St George's Day cards are in the *This England* shop. See page 97.

MAKE DO AND MEND

Products with a short lifespan which get dumped in landfill are a scourge that is having a devastating effect on our planet, so we were heartened to read lately about the growing popularity of repair cafés. These community-based venues, popping up in towns and cities across the country, invite people to bring in broken appliances and other household items to be fixed free of charge by volunteers.

Once upon a time, fixing broken consumer goods would have been the norm, but in the last 50 years we have moved towards throwing away broken items to replace them with new ones. Many have been designed with built-in obsolescence, ensuring a continual demand for more.

With the planet now struggling to cope with so much discarded stuff (491,212 tonnes of household electronic and electrical equipment was discarded in 2021 according to the Environment Agency) a change of attitude is sorely needed.

And with the cost of living uppermost in people's minds, what could make more sense than mending rather than replacing? *To find a repair café near you visit repaircafe.org.*

A happy customer at a repair café in Bristol

>

A RUFF BUSINESS

By now, Liz Truss's premiership feels like something of a distant memory. The shortest serving Prime Minister in history, she remained in office for all of 44 days.
This proved inconvenient for London entrepreneur David Farquharson. Having kept a close eye on the Tory leadership race, Farquharson came up with the bright idea of creating a Liz Truss dog toy. After designing the toy, creating samples and allowing his own dog to test them, he found a manufacturer and placed an order for hundreds of the toys, setting himself back thousands of pounds. However, by the time the shipment arrived, Liz Truss had stepped down as Prime Minister, and Farquharson found himself with a flat full of no-longer-topical Liz Trusses.

Following Truss's resignation, the internet was quick to point out things that lasted longer than her premiership. These included the number of days *Believe* by Cher remained at Number One in the charts; the Tory leadership race itself; the UK series of reality TV show *Married at First Sight*; and of course the lettuce which *The Daily Star* livestreamed during Truss's premiership, to monitor whether it could outlast the PM. It did.

Our heartfelt sympathies go to David and his many, many miniature Liz Trusses.

David Farquharson

Something to chew over!

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS

For the first time in its 110-year history the RHS Chelsea Flower Show will host a children's picnic this year. One hundred children are due to attend from schools in some of the most disadvantaged areas of London as part of an initiative to make the gardening charity more accessible and welcoming. RHS director general, Clare Matterson CBE, said, "I want this to be a special experience for all the children . . . igniting an interest in gardening that will be with them throughout their life. . . Having picked up my first gardening trowel as a young child, this is a really important moment for me."

Green fingers crossed it inspires these youngsters to do the same.

LIBRARY MISHAPS

We've all done it. Descended into panic with the sudden realisation that we've missed our deadline for returning a library book. For some, the embarrassment of returning a book late, and the fee which comes with it, might deter them from returning the book at all. For one Coventry man, this may well have been the case. A book taken out from Earlsdon Library in 1938 has finally been returned, 84 years late. The copy of *Red Deer*, by Richard Jefferies, was borrowed by the late Capt William Humphries. After discovering the book in his mother's house, Humphries' grandson duly returned the book to the library, making a donation of £18.27, having calculated that this would be equivalent to the 4,385d that would have been racked up in fines at the library's 1930s rate. At the library's current rate, the fine would have been £7,673, but luckily the library was willing to forgive and forget.

Elsewhere, a Leeds library made headlines after discovering a book laced with arsenic in their archives. The book *My Own Garden* dates back to 1855 and has a green cover, which owes its colour to a dye containing the toxic chemical. Librarians say that the use of chemicals such as arsenic was once common practice in the production of books to achieve colourful covers. Now, The Poison Book Project is tracking down historic books containing hazardous chemicals to ensure they are cared for safely.

Who knew reading could be such a dangerous hobby?

STRIKING SUNDERLAND

We were delighted to see that Katherine Taylor from Sunderland is keeping the younger generation engaged by creating and posting videos online revealing the hidden history of her local area. Having acquired a 25k strong following on social media platform TikTok, Katherine makes short videos documenting how Sunderland's streets have changed through the years, walking viewers through historical buildings in the area and chronicling fun facts about Sunderland and the wider North East. From Sunderland's secret lighthouse to the city's haunted Greggs, the videos are putting Sunderland on the map. Of course, you don't need to convince us of the merits of Sunderland. Neil McAllister's feature in our summer 2021 issue took us on a tour of some of the city's best bits, from the impressive Empire Theatre to the fascinating Washington Old Hall. If you missed it, you can purchase the issue from thisengland.co.uk.

Historical buildings, secret lighthouses and haunted Greggs – oh, my!

R-RATED ASTRONOMY

Sometimes it seems that artificial intelligence is becoming so prevalent that there will one day be no need for a human work force at all. However, every so often, blunders made by computers reassure us that this is still a long way off.

Back in November, Oxfordshire astronomer Mary McIntyre had her account banned from Twitter for three months after she posted an innocent video clip of a meteor which the platform's algorithm erroneously flagged as "intimate content" violating Twitter's posting regulations.

McIntyre's account was initially banned for 12 hours. She was given the option to have the ban lifted if she deleted the video and accepted that she had broken Twitter's posting guidelines.

When the BBC got wind of McIntyre's predicament, they stepped in, lobbying Twitter to end the ban, which eventually led to it gaining attention from Twitter's human moderators and the account being reinstated.

While Elon Musk's short-lived time as head of Twitter made headlines for his sacking huge numbers of Twitter's workforce, we hope he held on to enough staff to revise the platform's algorithms, which clearly need updating . . .

WOT DID U SAY?

Another sherry, Your Majesty?

We all despair at text slang used by the youngsters on their phones, but surprisingly it seems the attack on our wonderful English language has royal connections. A letter penned by a possibly inebriated Queen Victoria has come to light in which she appears to shorten words and phrases, including referring to herself as "q". In the letter she demands to know the height of a male donkey.

Paper expert Jim Spencer told the *Daily Mail* that a forensic graphologist "suggested she may have been a little drunk when she penned it due to the way the words drift off and the fact that they were so large – about three words to a line."

A pioneer of drunk texting!

ALL CHEER FOR BEER

Researchers have found that beer hops have compounds with properties that prevent the clumping of unwanted proteins in human nerve cells, a characteristic associated with Alzheimer's disease. Published in *ACS Chemical Neuroscience*, this means that especially hoppy brews could help protect us from the condition.

As good a reason as any to head down to the local.

LET ME COUNT THE DAYS

Calendars come in all shapes and guises, but the award for most niche must go to the Car Parks of Britain Calendar 2023. Courtesy of self-styled "Dull Kev, Ambassador for the Mundane", this wall calendar featuring "12 cracking car parks" has everything for the car park enthusiast, revealing those with the most exhilarating ramps, best views and highest charges. It's also printed in full colour (though it is, well, mostly grey). Of course, for a blast of colour to adorn your walls all year, it's not too late to treat yourself to the stunning *This England* Country Calendar! No concrete here, just pages of lovingly selected landscapes, such as the one beow, across our green and pleasant land.

No car parks here! Feb's pic of the MV Swift on Lake Windermere

DEMOCRATIC DIN

Anyone who's heard the rising racket before hundreds of roosting jackdaws take to the sky will know it's one natural phenomenon that can leave you with a bit of a headache. But research by the University of Exeter has found the cacophony is amazingly a democratic debate.

"After roosting in a large group at night, each jackdaw will have a slightly different preference about when they want to leave, based on factors like their size and hunger," said Alex Dibnah, who led the study. "However, it's useful to reach a consensus. Leaving the roost together has various benefits, including safety from predators and access to information such as where to find food. Our study shows that by calling out jackdaws effectively 'cast a vote' and, when calling reaches a sufficient level, a mass departure takes place."

Figuring out the economy?

It might sound like a din, but at least they reach a consensus. More than can be said for Parliament.

>

A PREVAILING SENSE OF HUMOUR

Since the passing of Her Majesty the Queen, more tributes have come to light regarding her "prevailing sense of humour". Writing in *Gardener's World*, Alan Titchmarsh broke his usual tight-lipped policy on private conversations with Her Majesty to share that she wasn't always keen on the late Duke of Edinburgh's green-fingered efforts.

"It's just not my sort of gardening," she said to Titchmarsh.

"And what is that, Your Majesty?"

"The kind that uses bulldozers," came the reply.

Contributor Graham Bebbington kindly shares another, previously unpublished, example.

The sparkling wit of our departed monarch

"For some years, I have had the privilege of knowing the Van Buren family, the international illusionists. Today, their famous act is presented by son Andrew and his wife Alison who have performed his acclaimed plate-spinning routine on television and before members of the Royal Family on a number of occasions.

"Andrew informs me that in November 2014 they were at a Grand Order of Water Rats event at Buckingham Palace during which Her Majesty enquired of him, 'Can you spin any plates?'

"Andrew replied, 'Yes, any plates!' to which the Queen quipped, 'Oh, we hadn't better let you loose with ours, then!'

"Andrew explained to Her Majesty that as he came from the Potteries area in Staffordshire he liked to use real plates such as Doulton, Wedgwood, Spode etc (as opposed to plastic). Smiling and chucking, Her Majesty replied, 'Quite right, too!'"

SPIRITUAL SERVICE

Towards the end of last year the Very Reverend Dr David Ison retired after 10 years as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. Throughout David's tenure he provided, as put by the Bishop of London Sarah Mullally, "skilful and sensitive stewardship". There were lighter times along the way, too, as David shared with us.

"A particular role for the dean is to welcome the principal guests at major services and walk with them in procession through the middle of the cathedral. St Paul's had no heating system until the Victorians put stoves in the crypt and punched holes through the floor, topped with brass gratings which had a cover put over them when female members of the Royal Family were in attendance.

"At one service I was talking with the only member of the Royal Family in attendance just as we were about to set off, and he asked why the covers were not there, and did I know that Queen Mary had broken the heel of her shoe on a grating in the 1920s? To which I replied, 'Yes, sir, but we didn't think that for you it would be a problem.'

"Another aspect of life at St Paul's has been occasional interruption of its services by protestors promoting various causes. I was about to preach at one televised service when four women chained themselves to the pulpit. When they stopped shouting and we could proceed, I opened my sermon with, 'I can honestly say that this is the first time I've preached to a truly captive audience.'

"St Paul's is for those who see it a symbol of London. It is also a place of prayer and worship, and a witness to the endurance of faith and hope – and, as with the Remember Me memorial to those who have died due to the pandemic, St Paul's continues its prayer and work on behalf of everyone."

The Very Reverend Dr David Ison

Chapter of St Paul's/Graham Lacdao

David, we thank you and wish you every happiness in your retirement.

Read about St Paul's architect Christopher Wren on p43.

RISE OF THE RAINFOREST

In a rare piece of hopeful news regarding the environment, two maps released by Lost Rainforests of Britain revealed that, if allowed to regenerate through careful planting and protection from pollution, our remaining temperate rainforests could double in size within a generation. As much as one fifth of Britain has the right climate for rainforests to flourish.

"I think the map gives a sense of hope . . ." Guy Shrubsole, who runs the campaign, told *The Guardian*. "It is highly likely that that area would have been once covered with rainforest thousands of years ago. Ultimately, I think that's something we need to take inspiration from and look to the past to think about what we need to be bringing back in future."

The RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and the Woodland Trust have all backed Shrubsole's campaign, as the areas are vital for biodiversity.

Temperate rainforests are of course different to their tropical counterparts so we're not expecting to see orangutans swinging through the trees just yet.

CRACK ON

In speaking to master saddle maker Clare Barnett (p50), writer William Gibson made an interesting discovery. Saddle makers are struggling to get hold of pig skins, used in many parts of a saddle construction, partly due to a rise in the popularity of crackling and pork scratchings.

"There are fewer leather production sites in the UK and with the cost associated with exporting the skins, meat processors have moved to selling them to pet food manufactures for dog chews and the fast-growing snack market," Tony Goodger from the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers told us.

In a phenomenon which Tony calls the "Home Pub", snacking at home has now become an "occasion" owing to changing behaviour following pub closures, the wide range of TV on offer these days and the cost of living crisis keeping more of us in to save money.

MENAGERIE CATASTROPHE

A lesser-known fact about Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti has to be his penchant for keeping bizarre animals as pets, as revealed in Susan Buchanan's wonderful piece on his eternally patient model and muse Fanny Cornforth (see p34).

In addition to the wombat, llama and toucan mentioned by Sue, we've also heard that Rossetti kept a peacock, which drove neighbours doolally with its cries, and a pet tiger, which must have frightened the postman. Apparently there is still a clause in the contract of the house on Cheyne Walk, Chelsea which says peacocks or tigers will not be permitted.

Honestly, Dante, what's wrong with a Labrador?

BAA-BYE TO TRADITIONAL STAMPS

In our feature on p61, Eleanor Doughty marks the end of an era, as traditional stamps will no longer be valid from July this year. The classic stamps are being replaced with barcoded stamps, which include a range of new features. Scanning a stamp's barcode before it is posted will allow us to track the progress of letters and parcels, and, best of all, provides access to exclusive videos made by Royal Mail featuring characters such as Shaun the Sheep. As we mourn the loss of a British icon in the form of the classic red stamp, we appreciate Royal Mail's effort in drafting in another icon from the farmyard to ease the pain.

Move over, Postman Pat! *Royal Mail*

HAMMER IT HOME

After 10 years of campaigning, a statue to Sir Henry Cooper has finally been unveiled in Bellingham, London, opposite the Fellowship Inn where the English boxer trained early in his career. Known as "Our 'Enry" and beloved for his indomitable humour, Henry represented Great Britain at the 1952 Olympic Games and was the first man to win three Lonsdale belts becoming British, Commonwealth and European heavyweight champion.

He famously floored a young Muhammad Ali at Wembley stadium on 18 June 1963 with his notorious left hook – known since as "'Enry's 'Ammer".

"There are so many memorable stories relating to Henry," says *This England* contributor Don Austen, who knew him personally. "He was a guest along with Dr Edith Summerskill MP on a *Panorama* programme in the mid-60s debating boxing. The MP was passionate about banning boxing and said to Henry, 'Have you looked in a mirror and seen your face?' Henry unabashedly replied, 'Have you looked in a mirror lately? I've been a professional boxer for 15 years. What's your excuse?'

"One special story stands out, though, and gives a marvellous measure of the champion. In the gym, Henry's manager Jim Wicks showed some photographs of Henry visiting a wheelchair-bound soldier who had written requesting his autograph. He'd decided to go one better than that and arranged a visit to the barracks. It was never reported, so no publicity. Just a personal gesture by a great English sporting hero."

Don with the statue of Our 'Enry!

ODE TO THE FAX

It was a staple of office life in the 1990s, with its silky paper, frequent jamming and sudden bursts into life every time the local restaurant updated its menu. But now that Ofcom have scrapped its requirement that BT provide dedicated landlines for them at affordable prices, the fax machine is to beep its last beep.

Many of us have already moved on, but there are some staunch supporters – not least the NHS who, according to the *Daily Mail*, still use more than 800 machines. It's also going to be that much harder to get hold of Dolly Parton. The country and western star eschews a smartphone in favour of the device.

In an interview with Apple Music's Southern Accents Radio, singer Reba McEntire explained, "That's the only way I know to get a hold of her . . . I even asked Kenny Rogers one time. I said, 'Do you have Dolly's cell number?' He said, 'No.' So you fax her."

Let's hope Dolly can keep working her 9 to 5.

Images: Alamy, Shutterstock unless otherwise stated

The back of the house from the garden with the glass winter studio clearly visible

The drawing room with circular window nook

HISTORIC HOMES OF ENGLAND

Leighton House

Dominique Corlett visits the imposing London home of Victorian artist, Frederic, Lord Leighton

I AM standing in an enormous hallway, with a mosaic floor, craning my neck to look up at the high, domed ceiling of glittering gold. Around the base of the dome, stained-glass windows emit colourful chinks of light. The walls of the hall are covered with elaborate tiled friezes in blue, green and white, depicting gardens with fountains where tulips and pomegranates grow and doves and peacocks perch in briars. In two facing walls, between a pair of grand marble columns, sits an enormous window, surrounded by further panels of decoration. These feature mesmerising, repeating tile patterns of flowers and geometric shapes, or intricate scenes picked out in tiny mosaics on a gilt background. From behind me comes the sound of a trickling fountain, sunk into the middle of the floor.

While it may not be on the scale of Istanbul's Blue Mosque or the Alhambra Palace in Granada, this breathtaking hall is clearly inspired by the finest architecture and interior decoration of the Islamic world. And it certainly creates a sense of awe.

What is surprising is that rather than being in Morocco or Turkey, it is located in Holland Park, London, about five minutes' walk from Kensington High Street. The Arab Hall is the crowning glory of Leighton House, the home of late-Victorian artist and president of the Royal Academy, Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830-1896), which has recently re-opened to the public.

"Leighton built this house over a period of 30 years and he was the only person ever to live in it, because it became a museum almost immediately after his death," Daniel Robbins, senior curator of Leighton House, explains.

"It was a project that more or less constantly preoccupied him. It's a whole series of extensions that turned the house from relatively modest in its first version into what was ultimately described as 'a private palace of art', not just because of the environment and interiors that he created, but also because it was full of these extraordinary collections of fine and decorative art that were arranged within it in a very considered and thoughtful way. The whole house became 'the house beautiful', the idea of the house as a work of art in itself."

An eight-million-pound refurbishment means that the original >

The Arab Hall cost more to build than the rest of the original house

Leighton's studio, with a view into the winter studio

Iznik ceramics in the dining room

> house can now be presented to the public much as it would have looked in Leighton's day. Parts of the building have been remodelled to add visitor facilities, including a new reception and cafe, a new stairwell and accessible lift, and in the basement, a drawing gallery, cloakroom and modern loos.

Leighton, who never married and lived here alone, built this home as his studio and as a place to show off his work and his artistic vision. He used it to launch his new paintings and to host parties and gatherings for the top echelons of society, with the house growing in grandeur as his fame and wealth grew. He also used it to display his huge collection of artefacts from the Far and Middle East. While not much of his own art was kept in the house, the many paintings he collected from other artists were displayed here. The house stands in the centre of what became an artistic enclave known as "the Holland Park circle" as other artists joined his orbit and built similarly grand studio-homes.

It was in 1864 that Leighton purchased his empty plot at 12 Holland Park Road and began work with his friend, the architect George Aitchison (1825-1910). The initial build was about a third of the size of the current building, consisting of what is now the central part of the house – including the drawing room and dining room on the ground floor, and his bedroom and large painting studio upstairs. The studio, where Leighton produced his enormous canvases ready to be delivered each spring to the Royal Academy exhibition, is the centrepiece of the house. Big enough to be a ballroom, it is lit by an enormous panel of windows in the back wall, overlooking the garden, which reach up to the ceiling and continue into the roof to maximise the light.

The studio was both a workspace and a showroom. It was here that he would host his Show Sunday events, where an audience would attend for the unveiling of the paintings going into the Royal Academy. Stepping inside was intended to be an impressive and memorable moment. Against walls painted in dark red and dark wooden floors, the space is filled with an abundance of art and decorative items, from huge pictures in gilt frames to plaques, busts, wall hangings, furniture inlaid with marquetry and sumptuous Persian carpets. Close to his painting space by the window,

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Just around the corner from Leighton House at 18 Stafford Terrace is its sister museum, Sambourne House, which also recently re-opened to the public. The home of *Punch* cartoonist Edward Linley Sambourne (1844-1910), the interior of this Victorian terraced home has remained virtually untouched since Sambourne and his family lived here and offers a unique window into an artist's family home of the era. Sambourne was drawn to the area because of the local arts scene, largely created by Leighton and others in the Holland Park Circle, and Sambourne was friends with many of his artistic neighbours.

While Sambourne and Leighton had met on occasion, they moved in different social circles and while still privileged, this middle-class home is far more modest than Leighton's, representing a more domestic setting, albeit one where beauty and art were still prized. Linley and his wife Marion moved into the house in 1874 and decorated in the "aesthetic style" popular at the time, epitomised by the wallpapers and fabrics of Morris & Co. The couple lived here with their two children and their servants for the rest of their lives. On their deaths the house was maintained by their daughter Maud and son Roy, finally being turned into a museum by their granddaughter Anne, Countess of Rosse, who founded the Victorian Society.

Sambourne House, 18 Stafford Terrace, London W8 7BH. rbkc.gov.uk/museums/sambourne-house

The entrance hall at Sambourne House

shelves are filled with ceramics and sculptures. At the end of the room, a piano sits on a stage under a half-domed gold ceiling where prominent musicians would put on performances for an invited group of his friends.

Leighton expanded his studio twice. On the second occasion in the late 1880s, he added a winter studio at the back of the house, adjacent to the main studio. This is essentially a glasshouse with its own heating system which allowed him to make the most of whatever daylight was available during the short days. While useful, it was probably also motivated by his desire to keep up with and outdo his neighbours, as the studio looks on to the winter studio of fellow artist Marcus Stone, whose house sprung up on Melbury Road behind Leighton's house during the 1870s.

"Almost all the plots along Melbury Road were bought by another wave of artists, who began to build their own bespoke houses using the most progressive architects of the day," explains Daniel. "This was no Bohemian quarter. This was very much establishment artists with >

The sumptuous silk room

The Narcissus Hall

> Leighton as the president of the RA at the heart of it. There is this slight competitive sense of building ever bigger and grander houses."

Trying to recapture the grandeur of this house has been a long process for the curators. The original contents were sold off at auction the summer after Leighton died. Thankfully, the amount of publicity that Leighton garnered for the house meant that photographs of the various rooms were forever being featured in newspaper and magazine articles. The 1896 Christie's catalogue, which listed every item in the sale, has also been an invaluable tool. Original pieces, such as the dining room table, have been recovered, or items similar to the originals found. The process gathered pace during lockdown – an ideal time for sleuthing and searching through eBay, says Daniel. The reopening of the house in October 2022 was treated as a deadline for filling out the collections, and more than 50 items were acquired during the refurbishment period.

Other items have been copied, such as the statement bookcases in the studio. The originals were part of the suite of furniture designed for the house by Leighton and Aitchison, but after years of searching, the museum decided to commission replicas. Other items have found their own way back to the house. Many years ago the museum was contacted by someone in Melbourne, Australia, who, after buying a cabinet and stand at auction, discovered the original Christie's sale catalogue in the drawer. Photographs of the studio confirmed that the cabinet had come from the house and after much toing and froing and a generous intervention from one of the museum's supporters, the cabinet came back to the house and was reinstated in its original spot.

Artworks have been easier to trace, but more expensive to buy back. The only work of his own that Leighton kept in the house was a series of landscape sketches from his travels, displayed in the studio, but most of the other rooms had themed collections of work by other artists. For example, the drawing room was hung with landscapes, while upstairs he displayed Venetian paintings and pictures given to him by his contemporaries. Many of the rooms now have at least some of their original artwork hanging in the exact position where Leighton chose to place them, an outcome that for Daniel is "the most rewarding thing" about the project.

The growth of the house mirrored the growth of Leighton's career, and by 1878 he had ascended to the lofty heights of president of the Royal Academy. With wealth and status under his belt, he was ready to embark on the most ambitious extension to the property: the Arab Hall. It cost him more to build than the rest of the original house put together. Leighton never formally explained his reasons for building it. He was overheard at a dinner party saying it was "for the sake of something beautiful to look at once in a while". He was drawn throughout his life to the art and architecture of the Arab world, having first fallen in love with it when he visited Algeria in his 20s and wrote to his father about the beautiful old houses with their internal courtyards.

In the 1860s and '70s, Leighton visited Turkey, Egypt and Syria, bringing back large volumes of ceramics and tiles. Whether he was buying these tiles in anticipation of building the hall or the hall was built to provide somewhere to display them isn't known, but he continued to task friends who happened to be passing through that part of the world with bringing back more. Among them was Caspar Purdon Clarke, who became director of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A). He was given explicit instructions by Leighton on where to go and who to contact. Most of the tiles came from Damascus, Syria, and date from the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

The hall was completed in 1882 and caused a sensation. There was nothing else remotely like it in London. The profile and prestige of Leighton's home grew enormously as a result.

"What's fascinating is that he didn't really get any useful, usable space out of it. This underlines that it was about display and creating this beautiful environment," Daniel says. "There was great interest in people coming to see it and to write about it. So while it was a big investment, there was a commercial payback." One can only hope that it also brought him joy.

Along with his art, the Arab Hall and the rest of this monumental house amounted to Leighton's life's work. The last phase of the development was the addition of the silk room at the front of the house on the first floor where he displayed pictures by contemporary artists who were also his friends. It is so called because the walls are covered in green silk.

"This was the very last room that he added, just in the month before he died," says Daniel. "So it's the culmination of this project that had preoccupied him for 30 years and the final part of the jigsaw."

Leighton House, 12 Holland Park Road, London W14 8LZ. rbkc.gov.uk/museums/leighton-house
The house is open Wednesdays to Mondays, 10am-5.30pm

Images: Dirk Lindner, Jaron James, Kevin Moran, Will Pryce

THE PRIME MINISTERS

George Grenville (1712-1770)

GEORGE GRENVILLE came to power facing an unprecedented series of challenges.

At home, Parliament was so divided he couldn't count on support from any of its largest factions, while King George III had spent the last three years attempting to rip up the unwritten constitution. Abroad, war in Europe had ultimately fallen in Britain's favour, but had left a huge hole in the country's finances and an uneasiness over what seemed to be only a temporary truce. Even a statesman for the ages would have struggled to preside over all these stumbling blocks. Unfortunately for the new PM, and indeed the nation, Grenville was no such thing . . .

Grenville was born in 1712 in Wotton House, Buckinghamshire, to Richard and Hester Grenville. His father and uncle were MPs, all five of his brothers would soon be MPs and even his mother was the daughter of an MP. George, however, grew up to become a lawyer. That was the path his parents set him down, leading him to study at Eton and then Christ Church, Oxford, before being called to the bar in 1735.

But his uncle, Viscount Cobham, had other plans. After a massive falling out with Prime Minister Robert Walpole, the Viscount began blowing through his vast fortune to organise some real opposition, mostly made up of family, friends and William Pitt. We now know that Walpole was able to cling on for another six years (roughly as long as David Cameron ever managed), but Cobham was still determined to make his final days as miserable as possible.

George Grenville in 1764, by William Hoare

Grenville resisted his uncle's demands for as long as he could, but eventually took one of the two seats for Buckingham and entered Parliament in the 1741 election.

Swapping law for politics may have been a smart move in hindsight, but the young man was bitterly disappointed to give up such a promising career to sit in opposition and be told what to do by his uncle. He was joined by the aforementioned Pitt, his brother Richard and various other young MPs, which led them to be known as "Cobham's Cubs".

His first stint in opposition lasted only until 1744, when he joined Henry Pelham's Admiralty Board. Having entered Parliament to effectively strengthen his uncle's vendetta against the Old Corps Whigs, it had only taken a few years for colleagues to note that his abilities would be better suited higher up. While Grenville didn't have the persuasive powers of Walpole or Pitt, he more than made up for it with his incredible knowledge of constitutional matters, prompting historians Graham Walker and Robert Eccleshall to write how "he usually bloodied anyone foolish enough to tackle him". Combining the above with his love for efficiency and the fine details of administering (his cousin Thomas Pitt once wrote that "an act of Parliament was in itself entertaining to him") made for a highly effective politician, helping to explain why he was chosen to be Lord of the Treasury in 1747.

A personal highlight followed two years later when he married Elizabeth Wyndham. Although theirs was a happy marriage which led to eight children, Elizabeth came from a long line of Tory politicians, and her grandfather, the Duke of Somerset, disapproved so strongly of their nuptials that she was left almost nothing in his will.

Of course, that hardly mattered with Grenville's career seeming to go from strength to strength. Pelham's death in 1754 saw Grenville promoted to Treasurer of the Navy, and he joined the Privy Council the same year.

The first bump in the road occurred the year after. Grenville's typically Whig stance on foreign affairs clashed with Prime Minister the Duke of Newcastle's beliefs that Britain needed to maintain European alliances. The government's decision to provide Russia with subsidies in the lead up to the Seven Years' War was heavily criticised by Grenville and Pitt, so they and several others were dismissed.

This wasn't to last, either. >

> Newcastle's reign was doomed almost from the start and he resigned in the twilight of 1756. In his place came the Duke of Devonshire, propped up by Pitt, while Grenville was given his old job of Treasury of the Navy back. Far from being relieved to be back, he was disappointed not to have been promoted to Paymaster of the Forces or Chancellor of the Exchequer, two positions which promised great wealth and influence.

Although he'd been close to Pitt for some time, with the Great Commoner even marrying his sister Hester in 1754, this was the last straw for Grenville, who now began developing relations with Pitt's enemies, the Prince of Wales and Lord Bute.

He spent the next few years building his reputation in the Commons – so much so that Walker and Eccleshall believed "no other senior politician at the time knew so much about official business pertaining to the Treasury, the Navy, the Empire and Parliament". He wasn't happy with resting on his laurels, either, championing a fairer system of paying seamen and supporting their families which was passed in 1758.

But despite all his good work and glowing reputation, it wouldn't have been unfair to claim that Grenville was being wasted at the Navy. Pitt called him "among the very first, if not the best Parliament-man in the House", and yet he wasn't even a part of the cabinet. Fortunately for him, George III's ascension to the throne in October 1760 soon changed that.

Radical MP John Wilkes was arrested in 1763

Previously, Grenville had been eyeing up the role of Speaker of the Commons. With his enormous knowledge of parliamentary precedent, he would have been perfect for this, a thought shared by many of his colleagues. Even the new King agreed, telling Newcastle so in a letter sent in early 1761, but added that "he would have rather kept him for some employment of greater consequence".

King George III had immediately brought Lord Bute into the fray and the Scottish Tory had just as immediately begun clashing with his colleagues. Grenville was spared due to their shared history, but Pitt and his brother Richard, now the Earl of Temple, were both forced out within a year, despite their assistance in a thumping victory over the Tories in the 1761 election. Attempting to remain civil with both sides, Grenville refused to take Pitt's position as Secretary of State for the Southern Department (one half of the modern-day equivalent of Foreign Secretary), becoming Leader of the House of Commons instead, but he did propose his brother-in-law, the 2nd Earl of Egremont, take it instead.

Another promotion came in May 1762, after Prime Minister Newcastle's resignation over the King's meddling. Bute took his place and Grenville was made Northern Secretary, tasked with wrapping up the Seven Years' War. It had ultimately been a successful campaign, but negotiations with France and Spain were dragging on, causing constant strife between the new PM and his ministers.

Where Bute was content with a treaty targeting long-lasting peace, Grenville and most of the cabinet demanded far greater compensation. The eventual Treaty of Paris swung more to the former's desires than the latter, and in October Grenville was demoted to First Lord of the Admiralty for his opposition to it.

But his return to the Navy would be even shorter than his escape from it. The experiment with Bute had failed: despite being quite capable of getting his peace treaty through Parliament, he was barely clinging on in the face of endless hostility.

Soon after the treaty had passed, Bute stepped down, recommending Grenville as his successor. George III had cooled towards his namesake, having been irritated by his time in the cabinet, but found him more palatable than either Newcastle or Pitt. So on 16 April, 1763, two decades after half-heartedly entering Parliament, Grenville was chosen to lead it.

The first order of business for the new Prime Minister came in his first few weeks. The King had delivered a cloying speech defending the peace treaty with France as "so honourable to my Crown and so beneficial to my people". This had not gone down well with radical MP John Wilkes, who had been ramping up his attacks on the government for some time.

Writing in his pamphlet *The North Briton*, Wilkes slated both the treaty and the government for failing the nation, but was careful not to extend this criticism to the monarch, which was a serious crime at the time. Instead, he condemned the King's ministers for forcing him to approve "unjustifiable declarations" and "the most odious measures".

Within three days of publishing, Wilkes had been charged with seditious libel, a criminal offence of inciting contempt or insurrection against the Crown. The King ordered his ministers to issue general warrants against everyone who had been involved in the article's publishing. This led to Wilkes's arrest, and Grenville found himself in the midst of a constitutional battle.

Publicly, the new PM chose the King's side, prosecuting Wilkes to the full extent of the law. Personally, he was a little more conflicted, agreeing with the radical MP and opposition that ministers shouldn't be allowed use of general warrants but arguing that it was, in fact, a matter for the courts to settle.

Wilkes eventually won his court case on the grounds of parliamentary privilege, leaving Grenville's reputation badly damaged, but worse was to come with the Prime Minister's handling of America.

Britain's hard-fought victory in the Seven Years' War had delivered vast new lands but had come at a heavy financial price, with the national debt rising from £72m in 1755 to £130m nine years later. Making this worse was the need to maintain a military presence in its new territories. Having

Top: The repeal of Grenville's unpopular 1765 Stamp Act was not enough to restore loyalty in the American colonies
Right: King George III in his coronation robes

already decided to keep the land tax at four shillings in the pound (unpopular in peacetime) and cut funding for the Army and Navy (unpopular with a growing empire), he looked to the American colonies for aid.

First, he placed a tax on imported sugar and molasses, disrupting their booming rum trade. When this proved ineffective, angering locals and failing to generate enough money, Grenville brought in the even less popular Stamp Act of 1765.

This required the colonies to buy British stamped paper with British currency and was applied to all printed materials, including newspapers, legal and official documents, licences and even dice and playing cards. The colonists reacted with rage, riots and a total refusal to follow the law. They destroyed stamps whenever they came across them and frightened distributors into resigning by hanging or burning their effigies in the streets.

In the case of Andrew Oliver, a Massachusetts distributor, they also tore down his office, set his stable house and coach on fire and looted his home. Oliver resigned the next day but was still forced to parade through the town and resign publicly for one final embarrassment.

But this was nothing compared to the humiliation Grenville faced back home. Both of his largest measures had collapsed, his traditional Whig views had left the nation isolated from the other major European powers and his relationship with the King was on the verge of breaking.

What took it over the edge, and ultimately spelled the end for his reign, was George III's first bout of mental illness in the spring of 1765. While nowhere near as problematic as the troubles he had later in life – which often left him ranting for up to four hours at a time – his incoherency still left him unable to act as the King, leading Grenville to introduce the Regency Bill to deal with a monarch unable to fulfil their duties. However, in an effort to stop the King's Bute-supporting mother from taking power, he removed her name from the act. The King was incensed upon discovering this, ordering him to reinstate her and forcing Grenville out soon after.

He never held office again, but remained prominent in opposition politics for the rest of his career, reconciling with Pitt, helping his core supporters win seats in the 1768 election and skilfully steering a bill on contested elections through the Commons in 1770. Sadly, a recurring respiratory disease finally caught up with him in November that year and he died on the opening day of the parliamentary session.

Grenville was well-known as one of the most knowledgeable politicians of his era. Writer Horace Walpole described him as "the ablest man of business in the House of Commons", while statesman and economist Edmund Burke believed he was a man to whom "this country owes very great obligations".

He was without doubt a brilliant legislator, but unfortunately made a poor leader, lacking the necessary tact and warmth. The King complained bitterly that "when he has wearied me for two hours, he looks at his watch, to see if he may not tire me for an hour more." A dogmatic refusal to understand his mistakes also haunted him. He spent his final years attempting to defend his Stamp Act.

This inability to connect with people can be seen perhaps most clearly through his nickname, "The Gentle Shepherd". After boring Parliament with a particularly verbose defence of the 1763 Cider Bill, in which he repeatedly asked his colleagues to tell him where else the new tax would go, Pitt drew laughter from the entire House when he whistled the tune of *O Tell Us, Gentle Shepherd*. Perhaps this is proof that all the intelligence, connections and wealth in the world can be, at least momentarily, bested with a well-timed joke.

ANDREW SHAW

Images: Alamy

MASTERS OF ORNAMENT

For more than two centuries George Jackson has specialised in intricately decorative plasterwork. Katherine Sorrell takes a tour of the workshop

THE year: 1891. The place: Osborne House, Isle of Wight – Queen Victoria's beloved seaside retreat. In the newly built Durbar Room, a state banqueting hall designed by John Lockwood Kipling (father of Rudyard) in Indian style, architect and artisan Bhai Ram Singh is supervising 26 craftsmen hard at work creating an ornate chimneypiece and overmantel. By the time they finish, the finely detailed peacock centrepiece alone will have taken 500 hours. Further lavish elements in this extravagant room include a deeply coffered ceiling in fibrous plaster, ornamental walls made from plaster and carton-pierre (a type of papier-mache), and an over-door panel depicting Ganesha, the elephant god of good fortune. It was – and still is – an extraordinary room, breathtaking in its elaborate finery.

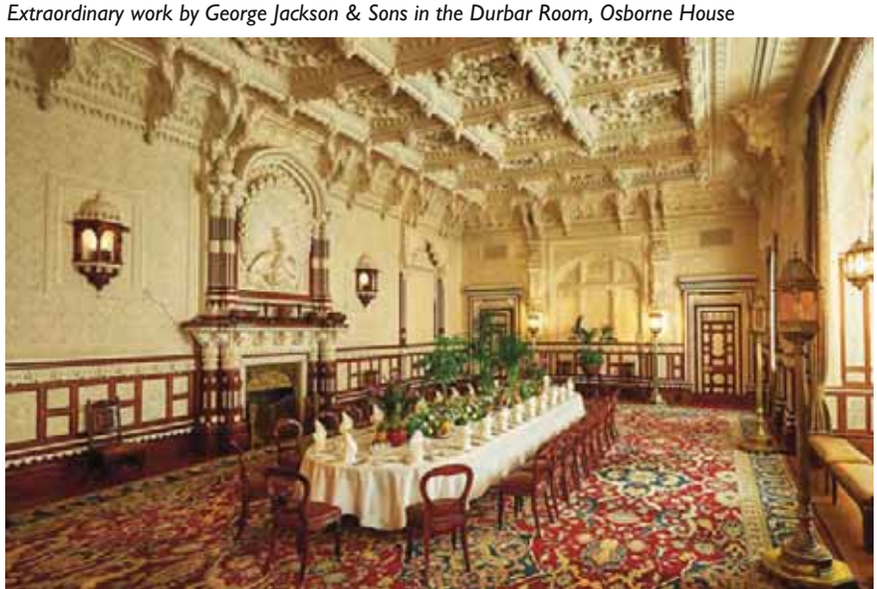
The craftsmen involved were from the London firm of George Jackson & Sons, specialists in decorative plasterwork since 1780, and still thriving today. In more than 200 years George Jackson has garnered five Royal Warrants and worked on innumerable prestigious projects. The pre-eminent supplier of decorative plasterwork in Britain through most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the firm is credited with pioneering the use of "composition", or "compo", in the UK, a putty-like substance that enabled the production of prefabricated decorative enrichments to joinery and architectural features without commissioning time-consuming and expensive hand wood-carving.

"It was an important development: the start of manufacturing, and of allowing more people to have these beautiful decorative elements," says Xana Haley, the company's co-director.

Parts of the George Jackson history are lost in the mists of time and parts are hearsay, but we know that George's father, Thomas, owned a frame-making business, and that he might even have produced mouldings for interiors designed by renowned architect Robert Adam. George was probably born in 1779 and seems to have begun his career as a supplier of glue, but by 1811 he was working closely with his father, producing and supplying composition ornament for picture frames, harps, curtain poles and architectural decoration.

From 1815 to 1822 the Jacksons were employed by decorators Frederick Crace of London to embellish several rooms of the Prince Regent's Royal

Extraordinary work by George Jackson & Sons in the Durbar Room, Osborne House



A recent example of fine plasterwork

Top left: Dusting a mould in preparation for use
Top: The workshop today
Above: Details on a ceiling centre are sharpened up by hand

Pavilion in Brighton – the earliest-known evidence of Jackson's work. After the Prince Regent succeeded to the throne in 1820, he asked them to be involved with the conversion of Buckingham House to a state palace. The firm supplied oak-leaf pilaster strips for the throne room, composition roses, thistles and shamrocks in descending sizes for the music room, and a large number of composition rosettes for the green drawing room. In 1826, King George IV granted the business a Royal Warrant.

Based in London's Rathbone Place, the firm went from strength to strength, George now in business with his sons. Among their eminent commissions, they worked for the Duke of Wellington, created an enclosure for marshalling the guests at Queen Victoria's coronation and supplied richly ornamented frames for Buckingham Palace.

When George died in 1850, his sons carried on, winning two medals in the Great Exhibition of 1851. Some time later, they bought the patent for making fibrous plaster – a mix of plaster of Paris, hessian and timber laths – from French modeller and sculptor Léonard Alexandre Desachy, and enjoyed enormous success with this new material, which was light, strong and simple to fix in place. Coinciding with the boom in theatre and music hall construction between 1880 and 1910, fibrous plaster became ubiquitous as a means of imitating sumptuous decoration in a simple material, and Jacksons worked on more than 40 theatres in London and the provinces.

They also decorated museums, art galleries, libraries, universities, asylums and ocean liners, and were successful with commissions for ornamental ceilings for the homes of the nouveau riche both at home and abroad, often working with well-known architects George Devey and Edwin Lutyens.

In 1947, the Jackson family ownership ended when Edward Francis Jackson sold the firm to Harry Leighton of Fenning and Co. Ltd. Work continued in the same vein, though there was far less demand for classical ornamentation and more need to repair bomb-damaged buildings. Restoration became an important part of the firm's repertoire, and beneficiaries included Basildon Park, Lancaster House, the Royal Pavilion, Windsor Castle, Uppark and Hampton Court.

Having changed hands several more times, George Jackson was bought in 2011 by a family business, and is now under the direction of husband-and-wife team David Serra and Xana Haley. "David and I have backgrounds in civil engineering and were working in construction," says Xana. "We had always wanted to have our own business, one that made something, because that brings such pleasure. When we saw George Jackson we fell in love. Our background means we are able to run big projects where you need really good management, quality control, health and safety, and so on, and while we didn't know a great deal about the plasterwork or the historical side at the time, that has been really fun to learn."

Today, George Jackson still specialises in architectural plasterwork for interiors and exteriors, working in traditional composition and fibrous plaster, and also the newer product of glass-reinforced gypsum, which is stronger and can cover longer spans. It is the only company in existence that carries out large-scale work using composition, which is mixed to its own tried-and-tested recipe. It is also able to supply individual, hand-crafted plasterwork mouldings, in the form of cornices, friezes, corbels, capitals and ceiling roses, from its in-house Jackson Range.

Bespoke decorative ceilings are a mainstay of the company's work, in both new and traditional designs. "We're well-known for the Robert >

George Jackson plasterwork in Buckingham Palace

Making carton-pierre ornaments in the 19th century

> Adam style," explains Xana, "but we also undertake modern work and can design individual solutions for every type and period of building. We won an award for our work on Langley Park House, for example, a Grade II listed Palladian mansion. Half of the project was replicating original decorative features that had been damaged or removed, and half was creating barrel vaults and cornices for a new spa."

While the George Jackson office (now in Sutton, Surrey) is utterly modern and all drawings are done on computer, the methods by which its enrichments are made are virtually identical to those of 200 years ago.

"If we were doing a traditional ceiling or cornice we would use exactly the same products – plaster, hessian and timber laths," says Xana. "The process is pretty much the same. We have a whisk for larger amounts of plaster, but quite often it's a hand in a bowl."

Mixing and casting is a highly skilled role that can take a great deal of time to perfect, she explains. "To cast a cornice, ensuring that the plaster is the right consistency, that the mould is filled correctly and with no air bubbles, would probably take six months to learn. To be able to work faster, perhaps another six months. Then there are lots of techniques which create different shapes that need to be mastered, and perfecting how to make an entire decorative ceiling or dome takes years."

A bespoke cornice alone involves a complex series of processes, starting with computer-aided drawings, followed by making a mould, and then casting final plasterwork. First, a plain background is made up, using a piece of zinc that has been cut out to the reverse shape of the cornice, a wooden structure called a "horse" and a "gauge" of wet plaster. The gauge is placed on a bench and the horse repeatedly pulled along a rail and over the plaster, creating the required shape. For the decorative elements – such as egg and dart or acanthus – a batch of compo (with a texture like very stiff plasticine) is made up, and placed in a chosen historic mould. The compo is pressed in by a heavy duty hand press, then cut off the mould and laid on to the plaster background. This is repeated for each element until the full cornice is ready to be made good and any tiny gaps stopped in.

Next, a rubber mould is made by setting up a wooden box around the plaster-and-compo cornice, and the rubber slowly poured into it. Once set, this new rubber mould can be used to make the final cornice. A plaster gauge is splashed and then brushed into the rubber mould, ensuring there are no air bubbles and that the finished surface will be crisp. A layer of hessian follows, then more plaster, and then lathes to give rigidity. Both hessian and lathes are soaked so that everything dries at the same rate. After about 10 minutes the plaster will go "off", and the whole cornice can be carefully removed from the mould before being placed in the drying room for 24 hours, after which it is ready to be installed on site.

The firm's not-so-secret weapon is its collection – one of the largest in the world – of more than 11,000 original boxwood moulds, which are stored on the shelves and walls of a long corridor in its workshop. Hand carved with great delicacy and precision in reverse (so that when their plaster contents are turned out they are the correct way round), the moulds date back to the origins of the company and through the ensuing decades, an incredible resource of decorative embellishments in the range of styles used in Georgian, Regency, Victorian and later times. A never-ending source of inspiration for architects and interior designers, the moulds can be used in new, bespoke designs and have proved to be invaluable for restoration projects, alongside the company's extensive library of historical documents, books and drawings.

Take London's Café Royal, for example: George Jackson was able to locate the original boxwood moulds that were used to create the decorative mouldings in the 150-year-old building, and employ them for its restoration a few years ago.

"The moulds are a unique resource," explains Xana. "They are the actual moulds that were used to produce decorative plasterwork in Georgian times and onwards, so when people come to us, they know they are getting the original article."

With recent projects that have included Chelsea Barracks, Annabel's private members club and the brand-new London restaurant Bacchanalia, what's in the future for this renowned company? "We don't want to change much," says Xana. "The wonder of George Jackson is that it has been using the same materials and products for hundreds of years. We just want to continue our legacy with more beautiful plasterwork on ceilings and buildings for people to enjoy."

georgejackson.com

Images: George Jackson, Shutterstock, English Heritage

NOT SO FOOLISH

We live in a golden era of April Fool's pranks, says Brian Viner

Shutterstock.

MY wife remembers only one April Fool's Day joke from her childhood half a century ago, but it happened every year. Every 1 April her father would wake her up with the thrilling news that it was snowing outside. She would duly shriek with excitement, then whip open the curtains to drizzle, steady rain, perhaps frost, or even a glimmer of early morning Yorkshire sunshine. But never, ever snow. Moments later she would hear exactly the same routine in her sister's bedroom next door.

That was what passed for an April Fool's prank in those days. Not many of us did any better, though we were occasionally subjected to more sophisticated spoofs, all the more convincing when they came from authoritative sources such as the BBC. The really famous one, a few years before my time, was the 1957 spaghetti-tree hoax on *Panorama*, when highly respected reporter Richard Dimbleby solemnly voiced a short film about that year's bumper spaghetti harvest in Switzerland, following the eradication of the pesky "spaghetti weevil". Millions of viewers were taken in. Some even phoned in to ask how they could cultivate their own spaghetti crop.

Other countries also play practical jokes on 1 April, and Swedish television pulled off a memorable one in 1962 when it broadcast a five-minute special carefully explaining how viewers could turn a black-and-white transmission into colour by placing a nylon stocking in front of the TV. Diagrams were shown, detailing the physics behind the transformation. Thousands of Swedes gave it a go.

On the whole, though, the golden era for April Fool's spoofs is now. Despite the odd humdinger, 1 April used to come and go without television, radio and newspapers all trying to pull the wool over our eyes. Now, it seems to be obligatory, and because as a people we are less naive than we used to be, they have to be ever more ingenious. A few of them fail this test. Last April, *The Daily Telegraph*, with an eye-rolling lack of imagination, published a notably silly story about England's Test cricketers. After defeats against Australia and the West Indies, reporter Al O'Florip (an unconvincing anagram of April Fool . . . how many O'Florips are there in the phone book?) claimed the England and Wales Cricket Board had decided to replace the men with the more successful women's team for the forthcoming series against New Zealand. England fan Olaf Pirlo (oh, dear) was reportedly unimpressed, describing the plan as a "joke". The public wondered why they bothered.

"With all the terrible news we keep hearing, we need all the innocent pranks we can get"

But there were some much better spoofs last year. For example, *The Guardian* reported that MPs were lobbying Downing Street to put a super yacht recently seized from a Russian oligarch at the disposal of the Royal Family. The best April Fool's gags must either capitalise on our collective gullibility, as in the case of the spaghetti harvest, or contain a grain of plausibility, like *The Guardian*'s super yacht report. Another nice line of vaguely believable fake news was put out by *Wales Online*, announcing that the Second Severn Crossing, named after the Prince of Wales, was to be rebranded in honour of the footballer Gareth Bale.

And it wasn't just news organisations that played the game. St Austell Brewery in Cornwall announced an exciting new partnership with Rodda's Cornish Clotted Cream; together they would be producing a limited-edition beer called Cream First, a clotted cream and strawberry pale ale. That, too, in our crazy world, had a vague whiff of truth. So, even, did the tweet from TV personalities Ant and Dec, unveiling their new cryptocurrency, Toon Coin.

All this adds immeasurably to the gaiety of the nation. With all the terrible news we keep hearing, we need all the innocent pranks we can get. Maybe that's why April Fool's stunts are much more prevalent than they used to be. Though it also has a lot to do with the unstoppable rise of social media; with the many issues this causes, it's rather lovely to have a day synonymous with gentle fun. Moreover, by joining in, we become part of a lineage that stretches back for centuries. Nobody seems to know for certain how it all began, but one theory suggests that its origins lie in the Hilaria festival in Ancient Rome. A tradition so venerable is surely worth toasting, preferably with a foaming glass of clotted cream ale.

At the Platinum Jubilee Pageant, Buckingham Palace

A NEW ROYAL ERA

As King Charles III steps forward to embrace his destiny, Paul James profiles a monarch for the 21st century

IF chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me." Playing the title role of Shakespeare's Macbeth in a school play, when the 17-year-old Prince Charles spoke this line there was a frisson amongst the audience. All knew his destiny.

His was to be a long apprenticeship but, at the age of 73, King Charles III came to the throne with more experience and better prepared than any previous monarch in history.

The world has changed immeasurably since his birth at Buckingham Palace on Sunday 14 November, 1948, at 9.14pm. His mother, Princess Elizabeth, was a much-loved heir to the throne and her marriage to Prince Philip in 1947 had been the first major royal occasion and cause for celebration since the end of the war. Now, the birth of a son secured the line of succession.

At the announcement of his birth, a crowd of some 3,000 people in the Mall cheered loudly and began singing *Rule Britannia*. The next day flags flew, guns saluted, thousands of cards, telegrams and parcels arrived from well-wishers. Even the fountains in Trafalgar Square were floodlit in blue to herald his birth.

Soon family members and royal household staff queued outside the nursery for their first sight of the 7 lb 6 oz baby, and Cecil Beaton took the first formal photograph. It was just a small taste of things to come.

A sense of history and continuity has been a major feature of King Charles's life. He was christened Charles Philip Arthur George in the Music Room of Buckingham Palace on 15 December, wearing the Honiton lace robe that had been worn by all royal babies since 1841, in the presence of four granddaughters of Queen Victoria. Queen Mary gave a christening gift of a silver gilt cup and cover, originally given by George III to a godson in 1780. She wrote in her diary that night: "I gave a present from my great-grandfather to my great-grandson 168 years later!"

In 1949 Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh took up residence at Clarence House, where the sunny nursery on the top floor became Prince Charles's domain. Over half a century later, Clarence House became his official residence, and it is a place that he still loves.

Images: Shutterstock, Alamy

Prince Charles was soon joined in the nursery by his sister, Princess Anne, born at Clarence House on 15 August, 1950.

On his mother's accession, Prince Charles became the heir apparent. He received the traditional titles Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, and Great Steward of Scotland.

Whilst the prince was given as much routine as possible throughout early childhood, it was not always achievable. Royal duties took his parents away, such as the six-month Commonwealth tour of 1953-54. They were on the opposite side of the world on Christmas Day and he could only speak to them on the telephone. The Queen did not see her children again until April 1954, onboard the new royal yacht *Britannia* for the last leg of the voyage home. She recalled that "They were very polite. I don't think they knew who we were."

Unlike any previous heir to the throne, Prince Charles went to school from a young age rather than having a private tutor. He became a day pupil at Hill House School in London, before becoming a boarder at Cheam Preparatory School in Berkshire. After the museum-like tranquillity of Buckingham Palace, he found the clamour of boys' voices and the clanging of bells difficult to cope with. Simple situations, such as when the other boys discussed their home lives, were awkward as he could not reveal any private details about the Royal Family. When he had a tummy upset, he said it was because he wasn't used to such rich food at home!

Life only became harder when he was sent to his father's old school, Gordonstoun, north-west of Elgin, in April 1962. Described as "the toughest school on earth", it was renowned for its harsh discipline, spartan conditions, early morning runs and cold showers. He called it "Colditz in kilts". The prince had some miserable times there, relieved by two terms spent as an exchange student at Timbertop, in Australia, where he enjoyed the remoteness and relaxed atmosphere. He returned home with a deep suntan and unexpectedly found himself something of a heartthrob amongst teenage girls. Despite some negative feelings about Gordonstoun, the prince endorsed the school's ideology that the strong must be courteous to the weak, and service to others is more important than self-service. They are principles that he has adhered to throughout his life.

Top: King Charles III visits the Metropolitan Police
Above: Charles and Camilla visit Dunfermline to mark its new city status

In 1967 Prince Charles moved on to Trinity College, Cambridge, to read archaeology, anthropology, and history. University proved to be an enjoyable experience and he particularly relished the opportunity to take part in revue sketches, once appearing on stage as a singing dustman. He showed that he had an aptitude for work, studying for around 40 hours each week and reading on average one book a day, excellent training for the royal duties ahead.

After a period at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, studying the Welsh language, Charles was formally invested as Prince of Wales amid much pageantry at Caernarfon Castle on 1 July, 1969. In June of the same year a revolutionary television documentary, *Royal Family,* was watched by 350 million viewers worldwide. It was the first informal film of royalty. Prince Charles was featured in many scenes, cycling to lectures at Cambridge, water-skiing, picnicking at Balmoral, and chatting with President Nixon, but it was a scene at Sandringham when his cello string snapped and stung the young Prince Edward on the neck that viewers particularly remember.

He was regularly photographed playing polo and cricket, he enjoyed sailing, fishing, windsurfing, skiing, and shared his family's passion for horses. From an early age he took part in the annual yacht race at Cowes Regatta with his father, and later in life took up scuba diving. He made his first solo flight as a pilot in 1969, and his daredevil image magnified when he underwent periods of training in the Forces. On 8 March, 1971, the prince flew himself to RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire to train as a jet pilot, and later began a period of study at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, followed by service on the guided missile destroyer *HMS Norfolk* and two frigates. He qualified as a helicopter pilot in 1974, before joining 845 Naval Air Squadron, which operated from the commando carrier *HMS Hermes*. In February 1976 the prince took command of the coastal minehunter *HMS Bronington* for ten months and by the time he left in 1977, he had completed more than five years of service. >

Left: Charles with his parents at his christening; Right: Playing polo in 1974

> On leaving the Navy, Prince Charles created his own royal role. He once joked that he had to learn the way a monkey learns, by watching its parents, but in many ways he was ahead of his time. When he first began to promote organic farming and expressed concerns about the environment, he was ridiculed in some sections of the media. After speaking out about the ugliness of some modern buildings in the 1980s, architecture in many areas became much more sympathetic.

The prince even established the new urban community of Poundbury in Dorset, on Duchy of Cornwall land, to challenge post-war trends in town planning and to demonstrate how traditional architecture can still work in the 21st century. "Surely the time has come to escape from an almost adolescent obsession with being modern," he said, "and, instead, to be more concerned about being human." Due for completion in 2025, the development will eventually be home to 6,000. It already has over 180 businesses that employ 2,000 people. His idea was that you could have a town where cars were not the focus. Where areas were not divided into residential, commercial and industrial sections. Poundbury has proved to be a great success, has a low crime rate, a good community spirit and stable property prices.

He also placed great importance on his charitable work and has personally founded 17 charities. He was President or Patron of 19 under the banner heading of The Prince's Charities, the largest multi-cause charitable enterprise in the UK, which now raises almost £150 million a year for a broad spectrum of causes. He was also Patron or President of around 400 organisations, which he supported enthusiastically, but he will always be synonymous with The Prince's Trust which he founded in 1976 and has since helped to transform the lives of more than a million young people by giving them skills to develop a career and succeed in life.

Realising that he was in a position to be able to promote and protect our countryside, people, and national traditions, he took up the causes of many whose voices might not otherwise have been heard. Through letters and meetings with government ministers, by giving speeches and writing articles, he raised issues that helped improve the lives of others. In 2020 he established the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance to manage the natural environment effectively, from finding renewable energy to restoring forests across four continents.

Life changed dramatically at 3.10pm on 8 September, 2022, when Queen Elizabeth II passed away at Balmoral and the prince succeeded to the throne as King Charles III. He publicly expressed regret that due to the demands of his new role "it will not be possible for me to devote so much of my time and energies to the charities and causes about which I care so deeply", but the work continues in the hands of others, particularly William and Catherine, the new Prince and Princess of Wales.

In his private life the King has experienced well-documented problems. His marriage to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981 was dissolved 15 years later. Theirs was a union which had unique pressures, living out their lives under the full glare of the media spotlight.

On 9 April, 2005, Charles finally found peace and contentment in his personal life when he married Camilla in a civil ceremony at the Guildhall, Windsor, followed by a Service of Blessing at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. The pair have been in love for half a century and this year celebrate 18 happy years of marriage.

The couple undertake many hundreds of official engagements each year. Just as those who come into contact with the King comment on how relaxed, witty and genial he is, so the Queen Consort enchants everyone she meets and has become a great asset to the Royal Family.

Charles and Camilla share many interests, particularly music, art, theatre, and gardening. At Highgrove in Gloucestershire the couple take great pleasure in the garden, which he designed. The formal and informal gardens are run on organic principles and include more than 30 native

Above: Giving an inauguration speech; Right: In the jungle in Venezuela

English plants which were in danger of disappearing, and there are enough fruit and vegetables grown to keep the estate self-sufficient.

With a love of the theatre, one of the first joint patronages that Charles and Camilla accepted was of the Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond. In 2002 the Prince created a foundation to help more children experience the arts, and he also established the Shakespeare Summer School so that young people can gain practical experience in the theatre.

The King is a talented musician and can play the piano, trumpet and cello. He is a singer and, as a bass, has sung with the Bach Choir on several occasions. In 2000 he appointed his own official harpist to entertain his guests at functions, reviving an old musical tradition in the royal court.

Charles learned his duties by observing his mother.

The Royal Collection contains some of England's greatest art treasures and the King has not only developed a great knowledge of paintings, but he is also a skilled artist himself. It is not widely known that he set up a Drawing School at Hoxton in the East End of London, where budding artists can develop their skills. Camilla took lessons in watercolour painting so that she could share one of her husband's passions.

Many are surprised that the copyright of his paintings was under the name A.G. Carrick. Two of the King's Christian names are Arthur and George, and until his accession he was the Earl of Carrick.

The King's passion for architecture led him in 2007 to take on the mammoth project of restoring the 18th-century Dumfries House in Ayrshire. Due to his energy, fundraising and sheer hard work, this treasure was saved for the nation. In October 2022 an enchanting edition of the BBC programme *The Repair Shop* revealed not only the King's love of the house but also his engaging sense of fun.

In his first televised address following the death of his mother, King Charles III promised to continue his life of service and pledged to uphold the constitutional principles of our country and the Commonwealth. As monarch, he will be a focal point for national pride, unity and allegiance, bringing people together across all sections of society.

King Charles III's life has altered immeasurably in the past six months and will continue to evolve. Not least, now that it is His Majesty's Government, he has to deal with red despatch boxes of government papers every day of the year except Christmas Day. Weekly meetings with the Prime Minister have also become part of his routine. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018 it was agreed that he would be Head of the Commonwealth on his accession. In October 2022, the Canadian Parliament voted overwhelmingly to retain the monarchy. He has publicly expressed his sense of duty and responsibility as Head of the Church of England.

At his Coronation on 6 May he will dedicate himself anew to a life of service and duty. The ceremony will retain many ancient elements and rituals but will be very much for the 21st century. And as St Edward's Crown is placed on his head, it will be a visible symbol that King Charles's destiny has finally been fulfilled.

Coronation Day

As the King's coronation approaches, Paul James guides us through the ceremony and considers how it will differ from the past

EVEN though there were four coronations in the 20th century, that of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 outshone them all. Taking more than a year to plan, it was a day of wonder and spectacle. It was particularly special because it came just eight years after the dark days of World War II, we had a young Queen, and it was the first coronation to be televised. That day was many people's first experience of television.

On Saturday 6 May 2023, we will have another coronation, for our 63rd monarch, King Charles III. Today's world could not be more different. Back in 1953, who could have imagined being able to watch the coronation on a telephone!

This coronation will be tailored for the 21st century: shorter, more inclusive, with music to reflect the Commonwealth – yet the ancient traditions dating back more than 1,000 years will be no less significant.

The act of anointing and crowning has been carried out in England since at least the year 828, and the coronation oath that will be sworn by the King has changed little since the time of the Anglo-Saxons. In the Christian-based ceremony, there are Biblical echoes of Solomon's anointing by Zadok the Priest and Nathan the Prophet.

Over the centuries, coronations have followed the same pattern. The key points are:

The Recognition – the archbishop will present the monarch to all in the abbey for their acceptance of him as their "undoubted king".

The Oath – the monarch will swear to govern their people according to their respected laws and customs, and to preserve the true religion as Defender of the Faith.

King Charles will be crowned in May

The Anointing with holy oil, the most sacred part of the ceremony.

The Investing of regalia, such as the orb and sceptre.

The Crowning – when King Charles will wear St Edward's Crown for the only time in his reign.

Some of the holy oil used to anoint Queen Elizabeth II survives, but a new batch based on a 17th-century recipe may be made for the 2023 coronation. The secret blend includes orange blossom, ambergris, rose water, jasmine and cinnamon.

During the time of Oliver Cromwell, most of the Crown Jewels used in previous coronations were sold or broken up. After the Restoration, King Charles II had a completely new set of regalia created in 1661, some items based on the original designs. A few items are of earlier origin. The oldest piece that will be used in King Charles's coronation is the gold Anointing Spoon, used at the coronation of King John in 1199. A gold vessel known as the Ampulla holds the holy oil. It is in the shape of an eagle and the oil pours from its beak into the spoon. Created for the coronation of Henry IV in 1399, the Ampulla was remodelled in 1661 with new decoration, although parts of it are thought to date back 600 years.

The significant piece that will be used is St Edward's Crown, made for Charles II. To the untrained eye, the front and back of this crown appear identical. For the coronation of George VI in May 1937, a small piece of red cotton was discreetly placed at the front so that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, would know exactly which way round to place it on the King's head.

Before the ceremony, someone noticed an untidy loose thread and removed it. In newsreel, the Archbishop can be seen twisting the Crown around, searching for the thread. The King never knew for certain if he had worn it back to front.

For Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, two small silver stars were sewn inside the lining as a guide. In film footage from 1953, it is noticeable that Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher held the crown extremely high in the air so that he could see the two stars in the rim before lowering it on to the Queen's head.

The secret of how the current Crown Jeweller from Mappin and Webb can tell the difference is that the design is not symmetrical.

St Edward's Crown was reduced in size in 1911 for King George V's coronation, and the front cross now overlaps very slightly with the two flanking fleur-de-lis. There are larger gaps to the left and right of the rear cross.

The second method is even more subtle. The arms of the crosses are set with three stones, and the central stone of each varies in colour. In the centre of the front band of the Crown

Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 was a spectacle

is a square green tourmaline. At the back the tourmaline is oval.

The Imperial State Crown, worn towards the end of the ceremony, was made for King George VI. Identical in design to Queen Victoria's, it contains most of the same stones. It was taken apart by the then Crown Jeweller, Cecil Mann, in 1953 and reduced in size. It will be adjusted by the current Crown Jeweller to fit King Charles and will be seen again at future state openings of Parliament.

Where the 2023 coronation will differ from the last is that it will include the crowning of the Queen Consort. For this reason, the coronation of King George VI and his queen, Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) has been taken into account. On 7 May 1937, there was a separate part of the ceremony devoted to the consort's anointing and crowning. A new crown was created for Elizabeth, as had been for Queen Alexandra and Queen Mary. Each was set with the now controversial Koh-i-nur diamond at the front. Due to the current economic climate, it is unlikely that a completely new crown will be made for Camilla. It is predicted that she will wear the crown made for the King's beloved grandmother in 1937.

In keeping with tradition, the coronation will take place at Westminster Abbey. This year's will be the 40th to be held there since that of William the Conqueror in 1066. Lady Jane Grey, Edward V and Edward VIII did not reign long enough to be crowned.

The Abbey is home to the Coronation Chair, commonly known as St Edward's Chair, on which King Charles will be crowned. It was made for Edward I nearly 750 years ago and originally contained the Stone of Scone, known also in Scotland as the Stone of Destiny and in England as the Coronation Stone. The stone was given back to Scotland in 1996, where it is now housed at Edinburgh Castle, but will return to Westminster Abbey for this year's ceremony.

The Queen's coronation portrait

Amid the splendour on the day, one focal point will be the magnificent gold state coach in which Charles and Camilla will travel. Traditionally pulled by eight Windsor Greys, it is notoriously uncomfortable for its passengers. The four-tonne coach was built in 1760 and has been used at every coronation since the reign of George IV.

On Coronation Day 2023, new memories will be made up and down the country. A combination of pageantry, processions, crowns, music, crowds, street parties and celebrations, mixed with a feeling of patriotic pride, it will mark another milestone in British history.

On 2 June 1953 three-year-old Prince Charles was taken to Westminster Abbey for a short time so that he could witness the very moment that his mother was crowned. Some 70 years later that same crown will be placed on his own head. It will be a hugely significant sight for the public, but for the King it will undoubtedly be a deeply meaningful and emotional moment privately.

PAUL JAMES

With thanks to Historic Royal Palaces and Mappin and Webb.

Images: Alamy, Shutterstock

STAYING POWER

Ahead of Tate Britain's blockbuster exhibition on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Susan Buchanan shares the story of his enduring muse Fanny Cornforth

ON 25 August 1856 there were great celebrations in London as the Crimean War soldiers were welcomed home. Among the jubilant crowd was Sarah Cox, aged 21. A chance meeting that day was to change her life. She was to become Fanny Cornforth, a professional artists' model, the mistress and lifelong friend of a famous artist; yet she finished her life in obscurity and died in a lunatic asylum.

Kirsty Stonell Walker, a specialist in the life and times of the Pre-Raphaelites, thoroughly researched the life of Fanny Cornforth and her relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Her book, *Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth*, is the only detailed account that has been written about this fascinating woman.

The Blue Bower *by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1865)*

Sarah Cox was a country girl, born and brought up in Steyning, a village in West Sussex. Her father, Thomas Cox, married local Jane Woolgar in 1834 and Sarah was the first of their six children. Tuberculosis was the likely cause of four of their children's deaths, as well as their mother, Jane, leaving Sarah and her sister Ann as the only surviving siblings of their large family. As if she hadn't suffered enough, Sarah's prospects were bleak. Steyning, like other rural villages, was affected by the Industrial Revolution and Thomas and his two daughters had little choice but to look for work in a local town to survive. In 1848, they moved to Brighton, about 14 miles away from their home, where Thomas found work in the booming railway industry.

Sarah was aged 14 when they moved. Her father remarried and had another daughter, Mary. For three years, Sarah worked as a servant in a lodging house. Among the many false reports about Sarah was the suggestion that she was illiterate, but there are letters in her handwriting, albeit much later in her life, which are held in the Delaware Art Museum, along with her collection of Rossetti's pictures which she created with the collector Samuel Bancroft.

Sarah and her family returned to Steyning in 1854 after her father became ill and her half-sister, Mary, died. Two years later she first met Rossetti, a leading member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a small group of artists who created an alternative to the sentimental artwork of the earlier Victorian artists.

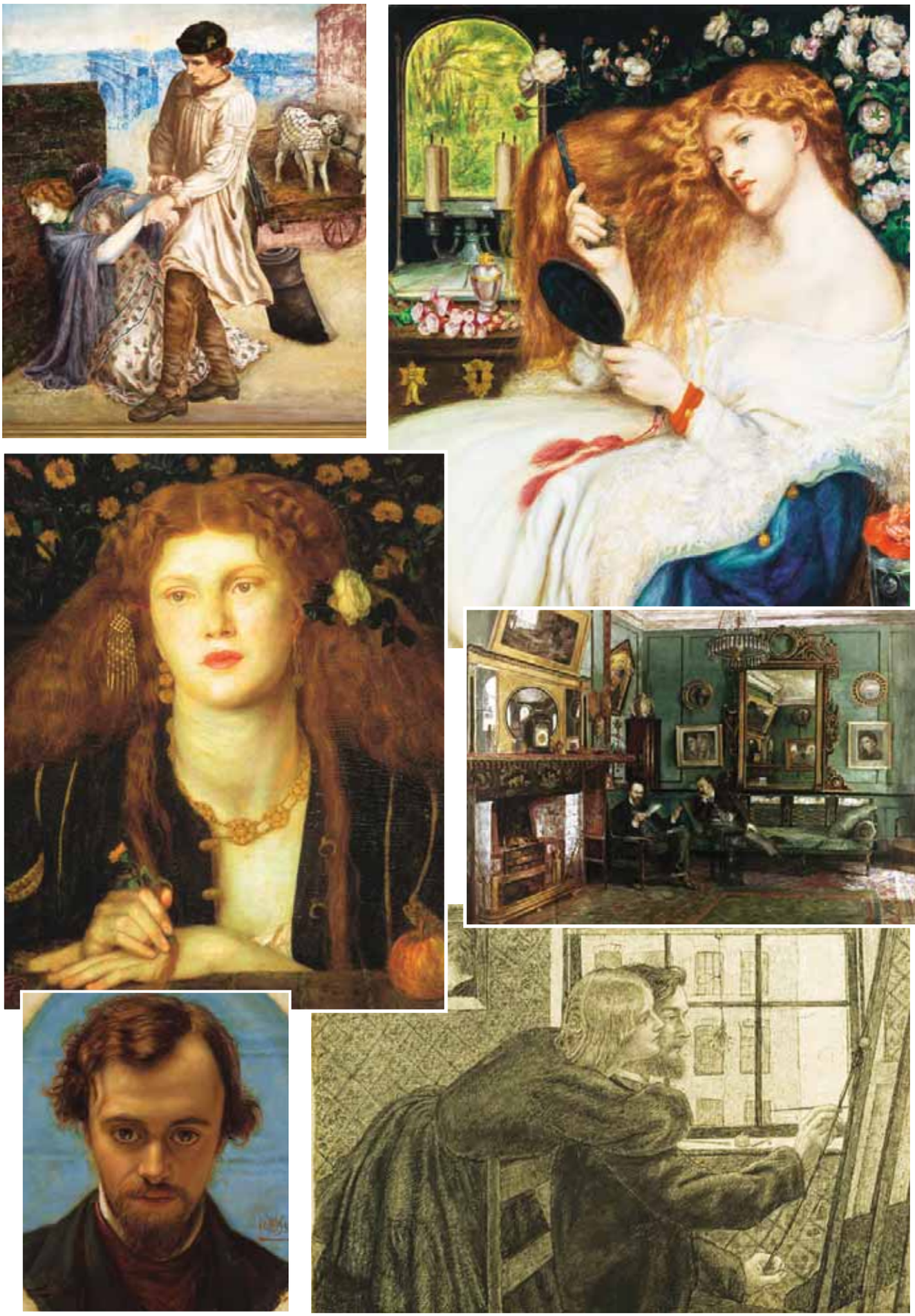
Dante Gabriel Rossetti spotted Sarah in the celebratory crowd that day in 1856 and he was struck by her beauty with her mass of long, flowing hair. Sarah's looks fitted the Pre-Raphaelite artists' ideal of the perfect model to portray their vision of a new, potent womanhood: strong, tall and with voluptuous figures and distinctive facial features.

Fanny later recalled the day they met and how Rossetti moved close to her and flicked her hair as if it were a passing accident. Her mass of hair tumbled down and he was captivated. He asked if she would visit him at his studio the following day, accompanied by her relative, and she agreed. That day was to be the first of many sittings for Sarah Cox, now known as Fanny Cornforth, as Rossetti's model and inspiration. He produced an estimated 60 paintings and drawings of her, which was to be the period of his most popular artwork. In return, he would support her financially.

Fanny became not just Rossetti's muse, but also his mistress. In fact, their love and friendship lasted for Rossetti's lifetime as Fanny was always there for him, despite his episodes of ill health, both mental and physical, his infidelity and the ridicule and rejection she suffered from his family. She stayed true to her roots and was thus looked down upon as unrefined, uncouth and outspoken. Dante Gabriel's brother, William, praised her beauty but dismissed her as having, "no charm of breeding, education or intellect".

Another artist, George Price Boyce, a neighbour of Rossetti, also fell for Fanny. However, she was deeply attached to Rossetti and dismissed Boyce, even though he could well have been a more constant partner, as well as being better able to give her financial support.

Important works include *Aurelia*, *The Blue Bower*, *Lady Lilith* and *Venus Verticordia*. However, the head of Fanny was later erased by Rossetti and replaced with another model in both *Lilith* and *Venus Verticordia*. >



Clockwise from top left: Found *(Rossetti, 1859),* Lady Lilith *(Rossetti and Henry Treffry Dunn, 1867),* Rossetti with Theodore Watts-Dunton *(Dunn, 1882),* Cornforth and George Price Boyce *(Rossetti, 1858),* Rossetti *(William Holman Hunt, 1883),* Bocca Baciata *(Rossetti, 1859)*

YOUTH, POWER, ENTHUSIASM

Founded in 1848 as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, this revolutionary group of young art students "really were the first British modern art movement" says Carol Jacobi, Curator of Tate Britain's new exhibition The Rossettis, which opens this April.

It was a revolutionary era, and the Brotherhood felt a new art was required for a new world. Founding members Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais were all frustrated by the Royal Academy, London, who espoused strict rules as to what a painting could be.

"Closer to the spirit of the revolutionary times than most, Rossetti was named after his father, an Italian freedom fighter forced into exile in London. Their house was always full of revolutionaries and . . . he was the only brother never to exhibit at the Royal Academy, and never to settle into a conventional lifestyle. The exhibition shows him reinventing art and life right to the end of his career."

It was both the Pre-Raphaelites' subject matter and style which was so controversial, aiming to highlight the suffering of the lower classes, including the plight of women, as well as creating bright and vivid landscapes. A key painting by Dante in the exhibition is *Found*, on loan from the Tate's exhibition partner, Delaware Art Gallery. Depicting a sex worker (modelled by Cornforth) as she is recognised by her childhood sweetheart, this elevation of such a figure to high art was radical. Rossetti never finished his image of Cornforth in this repentant role. The Pre-Raphaelites were also criticised for their work being highly sensualised such as Dante's *Bocca Baciata*, meaning "the kissed mouth", for which Cornforth modelled, and described by contemporary poet Swinburne as "more stunning than can be decently expressed because of its sexual implications." Critics were often left reeling by their art driven by, as Oscar Wilde put it, "three things the English public never forgives: youth, power and enthusiasm."

The Brotherhood's style is incredibly detailed, achieved using tiny brushes. They used the brightest colours and varnish to create a smooth, almost mirror-like surface. They often drew influence from literature. Painting from life, of "truth to nature", was also of vital importance to counter the effects of Protestantism and the clinical science that was emerging. For *Ophelia*, Millais sat "all summer, all autumn, painting every leaf and blade of grass, the ripples in the water," says Jacobi. Every single detail was imbued with meaning. The movement lasted until roughly the turn of the century.

Many of the paintings in the show were once Cornforth's. "So many of the questions their poems and pictures were asking, about how we live, how we love, are still with us today, " says Jacobi. "Like many teenagers, I became fascinated by the romance and rule-breaking of the Rossettis who I came across by accident sheltering from the weather in the Birmingham Art Gallery. I have been studying and writing about them ever since."

The Rossettis, 6 April-24 Sep, Tate Britain, Millbank, London SW1P 4RG; tate.org.uk; Learn more about the Pre-Raphaelites at henitalks.com/talks/pre-raphaelite

Ophelia *by John Everett Millais*

> This was not an uncommon practice amongst artists.

Fanny's commitment to Rossetti was to receive a crushing blow when, in 1860, he decided to marry Elizabeth Siddal, a popular Pre-Raphaelite model. Elizabeth was a delicate beauty in frail health and it is likely that Rossetti felt some sense of responsibility for her as they had been in a tenuous relationship for some years. Just three months later, Fanny married Timothy Hughes, an acquaintance of her earlier days in London, perhaps with a feeling of wounded pride. Whatever the reason, they separated soon afterwards.

Elizabeth died in 1862, just two years after marrying Rossetti. The cause of her death was an overdose of laudanum, which was believed to have been suicide. In a display of misery and guilt, Rossetti insisted on placing a volume of his poetry in her grave. Some years later, however, he arranged for it to be recovered.

After Elizabeth's death, Rossetti and Fanny were reunited and she went to live with him as his housekeeper at Tudor House, Chelsea; in reality, it was as his mistress. As they grew older together, and Fanny became less desirable as a model, Rossetti employed younger women for his models, but he did not reject Fanny as his partner. However, living with Rossetti was not easy. He was erratic and often depressed and had become addicted to chloral for his insomnia, a sedative with hypnotic effects. Fanny had to accept that he had other models and temporary passions, but a more serious affair with a friend's wife was to prove devastating for Rossetti.

The friend was William Morris, his business partner. Morris's wife, Jane, a recognised beauty, was also an artists' model. Rossetti had known Jane before she married and when he and Morris rented Kelmscott House in Gloucestershire, Rossetti – partly from his need for a quieter life away from London to ease his mental instability – spent most of the years from 1871 to 1874 using Jane as his model and conducting a secret affair with her, helped by her husband's frequent trips away. Fanny knew that his family objected to her presence in his life and hoped his fascination for Jane meant the end of their long affair.

Rossetti wrote to Fanny denying his affair with Jane and telling her that she was, "the only person whom it is my duty to provide for, and you may be sure I should do my utmost as long

Cornforth in 1907

as there was a breath in my body or a penny in my purse." Fanny had continued to look after Rossetti's house until, in 1872, he arranged for her to live in another house in Chelsea.

Fanny was a fine, buxom woman and over time she became plumper, as did Rossetti. Their affection for each other is revealed in their nicknames: he called her "Elephant", and "Lumpses", and she referred to him as "Rhino". He often included caricatures of an elephant in his correspondence, signing himself as "Old Rhinoceros".

Jane Morris eventually rejected Rossetti's attention as she became concerned about his addiction and periods of mental instability. On his return to London, he turned to Fanny for her love and support. Not only did she accept his mental state, his terrible moods and suicidal periods, but she had to accept his bizarre collection of animals and birds, including a wombat that made a bed in the middle of the dining-room table while a llama and toucan had free rein in the house. Nevertheless, she was always there for him, although now her position was primarily that of his nurse. He was aware that after his death Fanny might face opposition to her right to own his pictures. To ensure that she would be able to support herself, he gave some pictures to her and sold others to raise money for her.

As anticipated, in 1877 his family and friends conspired to take control of his affairs and made sure that Fanny was removed from his home.

This was not the end of their story, however. Two years later, despite Fanny having married John Schott, a publican and manager of the Rose Tavern in Westminster, she returned to Rossetti to look after him when he appealed to her to care for him in his failing health. John Schott was sympathetic and accepted Fanny's frequent absences, even when she accompanied Rossetti on holiday in 1881. His family conspired to take the seriously ill artist away from London to Kent to remove any hold that Fanny might have had. Fearing that his will might benefit Fanny, they arranged for a new will to be written in the presence of his family. Aware of their manipulative intentions but too weak to defend her, his final recorded reference to his loyal and loving Fanny was: "My poor mistress." Rossetti died in April 1882.

Despite her requests to be able to say her final farewell to her beloved Rossetti, the family did not tell Fanny that he had died as they wanted to ensure Fanny did not attend his funeral. Her enemies not only ignored Rossetti's wishes that Fanny be financially supported, but they also began an attempt to erase Fanny from any suggestion that she had been of any significance to him. However, they could not make any claim to the gifts of Rossetti's artwork that she had been given over the years. Fanny and her husband, John, set up The Rossetti Gallery in London which they ran for nine years until Schott died in 1891, by which time Fanny had relinquished the name of Fanny Cornforth and was now known as Sarah Schott.

It was at this time that Sarah met Samuel Bancroft who, over the next few years, bought the gallery's collection. Sarah and Bancroft became good friends and kept in touch with regular letters, which fortunately still exist. They show not only Sarah's situation at the time, but also her memories and feelings. The 1901 census shows Sarah, now a widow in her sixties, still living in London in a lodging-house. Her last letter to Bancroft was sent in 1903 and, when she was 70, he received a letter from a contact of Sarah informing him that she was losing her sight and hearing, as well as her sanity. In 1905, a friend of Sarah's wrote to Bancroft to let him know that Schott's sister, Rosa, had taken her care as she had become "quite an imbecile".

The final story of Sarah is that she was taken to live in West Sussex and, in 1907, was placed in the local workhouse because she was penniless. She was then sent to Graylingwell Asylum where she was said to be in good physical health, but that she was increasingly ill with dementia.

Two years later she became bedridden with bronchitis and she died on 24 February, 1909, at the age of 74. She was buried in a communal grave in Chichester's cemetery.

Paolo and Francesca da Rimini *(Rossetti, 1855)*

MUSES & MYTHS

"The myths that surround the Rossetti women are as vivid as the pictures. Was [Dante's sister] Christina Rossetti for ever heartbroken at the age of 19? Was Elizabeth Siddal really discovered working in a hat shop? And did Fanny Cornforth first accost Dante by throwing nuts at him in the street? Probably not," reveals Jacobi. "The detail that Cornforth was cracking the nuts with her teeth was probably added for comic effect!

"Cornforth was one of the working women inventing new ways of living, trying to find ways around the narrow roles expected of them, in a fast-changing world.

"Christina Rossetti, for example, shaped an independent single life to become better remembered even than her brother. The Rossettis' circle was open to working class friends, including women from modest backgrounds – Siddal, Cornforth, Jane Morris . . . The real stories that are beginning to emerge are even more vivid."

Images: Alamy, Shutterstock, Delaware Art Museum, Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0, Tate

TIMELESS YORK

From ancient architecture to chocolate, Mairi Hughes discovers all this northern gem has to offer

IT'S not hard to see why York was for a long time considered the capital of the North. Wandering through its maze of cobbled streets, decorated on either side with overhanging timber-fronted buildings, the Gothic cathedral looming on the skyline, there are reminders of the city's remarkable past around every corner. York's truly enchanting character continues to draw visitors from far and wide. Whether you're fascinated by the city's Viking past or simply a chocoholic, there is much on offer in this bustling destination.

A walk down York's famous Shambles, one of the best-preserved medieval streets in the world, will transport you back in time. With many of the buildings which line the street dating back to the 15th century, it is easy to picture the shop fronts, which now operate as quaint tea rooms, busy sweet shops and cosy pubs, as the antiquated butcher's shops which once famously lined the street. The street has scarcely changed through the years and at some points of the Shambles, it is possible to touch the shops on either side with your arms outstretched, the overhanging buildings having been designed to shelter the meat which hung outside the butchers here. If you look closely you will notice that many of today's shops still have old meat hooks attached to their fronts. The Shambles is even said to have been the inspiration for Diagon Alley in the *Harry Potter* films, and it's certainly just as magical. For fans of the franchise, there are four magic-themed shops dotted along the street. And, in the spirit of things not being quite as they seem, the Shambles is complete with a supposedly haunted pub, Shambles Tavern.

Another relic of York's past, the city walls which surround the centre are an excellent way to take in the local landmarks. Treading along the ancient walls will lead you in the footsteps of the Romans who built both the walls themselves and much of what they encircle during their occupation in 71 AD. A defining feature of York, these are the longest town walls in England at 3.4km. In spring, the walkway along the walls is popular for the views on offer of the daffodils which grow on the surrounding slopes. The walls are free to explore and open all year round, but those with mobility issues might want to give this a miss, as the walkway is accessed via narrow steps.

In 1080, the silhouette of a church began to emerge in York's city centre which would become known the world over and is now arguably the city's best loved landmark. Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux began work on the York Minster we know today after a previous church on the same site was burned down during the Harrying of the North. It hasn't been smooth sailing for the Minster, with fires in the 1800s, windows temporarily removed during World War II, and major engineering works in the 1900s to prevent the building from collapsing, to name a few disasters. Yet the church is still awe-inspiring as ever, with a breath-taking cavernous nave greeting visitors as they enter. Work on this section of the church began in 1291 and took around 60 years to complete. Don't forget to look up as you pass through here, as the ceilings are a sight to behold. Further down the church, in the south transept, the wooden roof is a more recent addition to the Minster. Rebuilt in 1984 after the church was struck by lightning, six of the ceiling carvings added at this point were designed by *Blue Peter* competition winners.

At the heart of the Minster, the Central Tower is the highest point in York and allegedly tall enough to fit the Leaning Tower of Pisa inside. Don't miss the church's Great East Window at the far end, which recently underwent a 10-year restoration project and is the single largest expanse of medieval stained glass in the country. Created between 1405-1408 under the direction of master

York's impressive Minster dominates the city's skyline

glazier John Thornton, the window depicts the story of the beginning and the end of time.

The church is constantly being restored. A major project completed in recent years was the revival of the Minster's grand organ. In a £2m project, the 5,000 pieces of the organ were taken to Durham for refurbishment by organ specialists. Internationally renowned organists are regularly welcomed to the cathedral for recitals. Finally, for those interested in the older parts of the church, visitors can see the tomb of York's very own Saint William in the Minster's impressive crypt, which was rediscovered in 1829.

Located on Deangate, York Minster's address is just one of many nods throughout the city to York's Viking roots. From Deangate to Stonegate to Petergate, several of the city's street names derive from Danish, with "gata", meaning "street". York's Viking period began with an invasion of the city in 866AD, led by Ivar the Boneless, and echoes of this era still reverberate throughout York in the 21st century. The then flourishing Anglo-Saxon city, complete with strong defensive walls and a royal palace, attracted the Vikings who would remain there with only a brief interruption from 866 to 954. This period was largely peaceful, with the Vikings farming the land and trading handcrafted goods in the city. Excavations of the city have uncovered textiles, jewellery, woodwork and metalwork workshops dating from this period, which paint a picture of the Viking community which thrived for nearly a century. The city's popular tourist attraction, the JORVIK Viking Centre, offers visitors the opportunity to be whisked back in time. An excellent experience for both children and adults, JORVIK allows you to take the weight off your feet and sit back on a slow moving ride through Viking-age York, complete with waxwork figures based on real Viking skeletons found in the city.

Conveniently located in the city centre, the JORVIK Centre is surrounded by great shopping, with the Coppergate Shopping Centre next door and lots of popular retail spots >

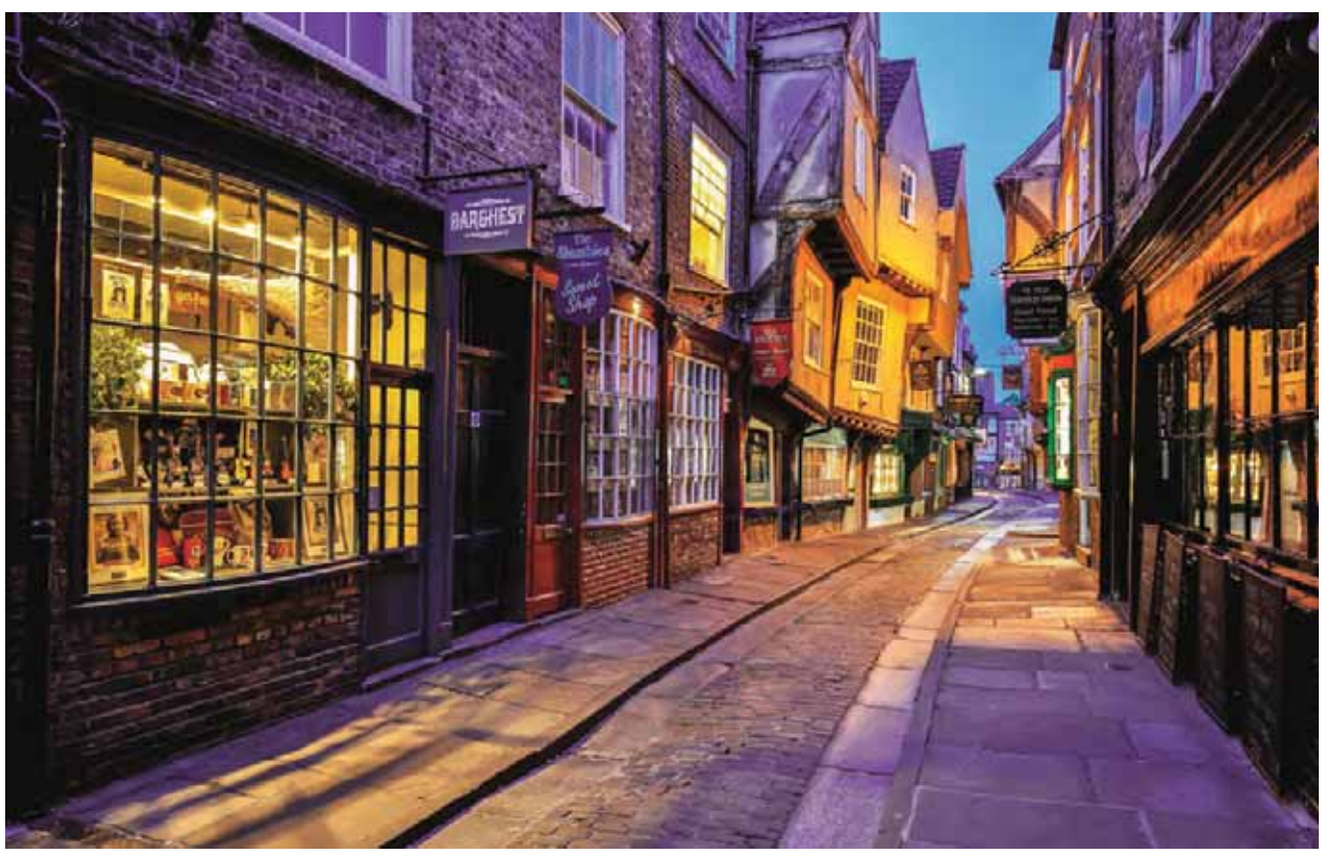
A walk along York's city walls in the footsteps of the Romans

The city is full of medieval charm

> scattered around the surrounding streets. Many of York's shops are located within the city's medieval buildings, making shopping here a unique experience.

If you're a big fan of fashion, York Fashion Week takes place from 27 April-1 May, and consists of various fashion shows, workshops, installations and more taking place across the city. Featuring work from both established designers and new talent, this event started in 2018 and has gone from strength to strength.

Don't forget to stop off at the Shambles Market, home to over 70 stalls selling clothes, accessories, crafts, fresh flowers, local fruit and veg, street food and more. It was the winner of the Best Outdoor Market at the 2022 Great British Market Awards and it's buzzing with atmosphere, so you're guaranteed to find a quirky souvenir here. However, if you'd rather escape from the hustle and bustle, just a short walk from the Shambles Market is a tranquil towpath which runs along the River Ouse. See the city from a different perspective along the riverside and look out for



Busy with crowds during the day, the Shambles is best visited early in the morning or late at night

YORK COLD WAR BUNKER

Located in Holgate, two miles from York's city centre, is a rare specimen of architecture from the late 20th century. A legacy from a time of distrust between East and West, this Cold War Bunker is a chilling reminder of the age of Armageddon.

The Bunker was part of a nationwide network of semi-secret posts equipped to observe and monitor nuclear attacks. This Bunker was connected to a cluster of underground monitoring posts that enabled it to alert the civil defence system to any potential dangers and damage from nuclear explosions. The national system of civil defence linked councils, police, health and emergency services. Under their command were repair depots, rescue depots and food depots. The purpose of this arrangement was to promote the survival of as many people as possible.

Fortunately, the York Bunker never had to do the job for which it was built in 1961.

It was always primed and ready during its operational life of 30 years. The Bunker's permanent staff of three was destined to swell to 60 if the worst ever happened. The full complement were trained civilian volunteers from the Royal Observer Corps, who would have lived in the Bunker and worked round the clock if a nuclear attack had occurred. The Bunker was fully furnished with communication and monitoring equipment, and built from reinforced concrete to seal it from a nuclear attack by withstanding blast and penetrating radiation.

Access now is by guided tour only and visitors today will see a well ventilated and well-lit interior with walls decorated in an institutional yellow. There are myriad rooms comprising canteen, kitchen, toilets, dormitories, an officers' room and a telephone exchange. The heart of the Bunker is the operations room. Here, information about damage and fallout would be assembled and assessed so that warnings could be given. There is also a decontamination chamber.

The end of the Cold War, signified by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, led to a reduction in international tension. Preparations long made in case of nuclear attack were relinquished. The Bunker was decommissioned in 1991 after the signing of a non-aggression treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It was taken over by English Heritage in 2000. Next, it was scheduled as a monument, restored and opened to the public in 2006.

A visit to the Bunker which needs to be pre-booked online is both an unusual and fascinating experience. It remains a symbol of a dark period of modern history when the future of the whole world was in question.

GEORGE SMITH

the wide variety of wildlife that lives here.

On a sunny day, Clifford's Tower is well worth a visit. The tower is the largest remaining building of York Castle. Having been burned down twice, the building that remains today was built by Henry III in the 13th century. Through the years Clifford's Tower has been a royal mint, a medieval stronghold, a Civil War garrison and much more. Learn about the building's dramatic history through immersive soundscapes and newly opened areas of the tower which were previously off limits. A roof deck allows visitors to climb to the top of the tower and provides unrivalled views of the city. Tickets for Clifford's Tower can be booked online in advance.

A particularly popular event in York in spring is the Dante Festival. Taking place between 17-19 May this year, the annual meeting of thoroughbred horses is held at York Racecourse, one of Europe's Premier racing tracks. People turn out in their tens of thousands for three days of top-class racing in gorgeous surroundings. With the racecourse conveniently located in the city centre, this is the perfect afternoon out on a visit to York. Grab your glad rags and enjoy the thrill of the races.

Those with a sweet tooth may well know that York is renowned for its rich confectionery scene. Dating back to the 1600s, when cocoa beans were first introduced to York's busy trading hub, confectionery businesses began cropping up all over the city in the years that followed. Run by famous confectioners Joseph Terry, Thomas Craven, Samuel Tuke, Thomas Hicks and Henry Isaac Rowntree, by the 1800s the industry was the second largest employer in York, and is still significant today. From Terry's chocolate orange to the humble KitKat, many of our best-loved chocolate products have come out of York.

Acquaint yourself with the city's confectionery scene at York's Chocolate Story attraction through its various interactive exhibitions. Visitors are never empty-handed, being provided with chocolate at regular intervals throughout. The tour includes the chance to sample chocolate at the various stages of its production process, and even teaches you how to become a chocolate taster.

The Shambles Market is a foodie's paradise

While many may think of chocolate when they think of York, others will think of railways. The city's renowned National Railway Museum, opened in 1975, documents emerging ideas and extraordinary achievements across the industry. Currently undergoing a transformation project to include the latest developments in railway >

WHERE TO STAY

Middlethorpe Hall and Spa

An impressive William III country house conveniently located a 10-minute drive from York city centre, Middlethorpe Hall is York's only country house hotel, decorated in charming 18th-century style. Tucked away from the noise of the city, guests can enjoy 20 acres of peaceful manicured gardens and a spa complete with a swimming pool, steam room, jacuzzi, sauna and gym.

Also not to be missed is Middlethorpe's renowned restaurant, which serves up an eclectic mix of delightful dinner dishes and excellent afternoon tea.
Bishopthorpe Rd, York YO23 2GB. 01904 641241; middlethorpe.com

Park Inn

Perfectly located for exploring the city, York's modern Park Inn hotel on the River Ouse is both affordable and has everything you need for a city break.
North St, York YO1 6JF. 01904 459988; radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/park-inn-york-city-centre

The Grand

This five-star city centre hotel is home to an award-winning cookery school and indulgent spa. Enjoy luxurious rooms and fine dining.
Station Rise, York YO1 6GD. 01904 380038; thegrandyork.co.uk

WHERE TO EAT

Mannion & Co

A great spot for breakfast and lunch, this café is located in the premises of a traditional greengrocers and serves rustic French and Italian style food, complete with home baked bread.
1 Blake St, York YO1 8QJ. 01904 631030; mannionandco.co.uk

Bettys

A visit to the famous tea rooms is a must. Book in advance for traditional afternoon tea, cream tea, or champagne afternoon tea.
6-8 St. Helen's Square, York YO1 8QP. 0800 456 1919; bettys.co.uk

Delrio's Restaurant

This quirky cellar restaurant serves excellent Italian food by candlelight. The family-run eatery is open evenings Tuesday-Saturday.
10-12 Blossom St, York YO24 1AE. 01904 622695; delriosrestaurant.com

> engineering, the museum is open to visitors Wednesday-Sunday and is free to enter, but booking online in advance is advised.

Perfect for railway buffs and novices alike, the museum is located directly next to York's train station and is home to trains old and new. Highlights include the revolutionary Stephenson's Rocket, which was built to run on the world's first inter-city passenger railway line between Liverpool and Manchester; Queen Victoria's resplendent Saloon, which she used on journeys between Scotland and London; the world's fastest steam locomotive, Mallard; and a luxurious Topaz Pullman Parlour carriage.

The museum walls are lovingly decorated with vintage railway posters, and there is even a simulator which allows visitors to experience the thrill of riding on the world's fastest steam train. This spring, the museum will be marking the 100th anniversary of the famous Flying Scotsman entering service with a series of events to celebrate.

From atmospheric medieval streets to myriad exciting events, truly quirky retail spots to seas of golden daffodils, now is the perfect time to lose yourself in the timeless city of York.

A visit to York wouldn't be complete without stopping at Bettys Tea Rooms

GETTING THERE

York is easily accessible by train, with the LNER taking less than two hours from London, and direct services running from Birmingham and the South West.
The TransPennine Express also runs direct services from Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle.
For more information, visit visityork.org.

Both National Express and Megabus run regular bus services to York from other major cities across the country. For information on bus services within the city visit itravelyork.info.
York also has several Park & Ride sites around the city, which allow you to drive to the city's outskirts and complete your journey into the centre by bus. For more information visit itravelyork.info.

Images: Mairi Hughes, Alamy, Shutterstock

CHRISTOPHER WREN

Wren by Sir Godfrey Kneller (1711)

On the tercentenary of the great architect's death, Paul Bloomfield explores the prolific career of a man whose personal life remains an enigma

WHEN the soaring dome of St Paul's Cathedral finally scraped the sky in 1708, England had never seen its like. True, it isn't the country's tallest – Salisbury Cathedral's medieval spire is loftier – but its combination of might and exquisite beauty was revolutionary. It commands the skyline of the City of London even now, three centuries later.

St Paul's is, of course, renowned as the masterwork of its architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Yet the many other achievements of this remarkable man, who died three centuries ago this year, are often neglected. He was also responsible for the creation of some 56 other churches in London, not to mention palaces, theatres, hospitals and a host of scientific endeavours. Now a year-long programme commemorating the tercentenary of his death – Wren300, supported by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund – is celebrating these diverse creations.

Much activity is focused on the Square Mile of the City of London, where around two dozen Wren churches – including St Paul's – survived the Blitz, redevelopment and other challenges, and will host exhibitions and musical performances. These will include a "Wrenathon", bringing together choirs from a range of communities to sing music ranging from baroque and classical to contemporary and jazz. Secular Wren venues elsewhere around England (particularly Oxford and Cambridge) will also host concerts, walking tours and other activities.

The man behind the monuments was every bit as remarkable as his creations. "He was really extraordinary – a genius," says Adrian Tinniswood, author of the magisterial and engaging biography *His Invention So Fertile* (Jonathan Cape, 2001). "This is a man who performed the first canine splenectomy, invented intravenous drips, charted the paths of comets and mapped the moon – and then thought he'd have a go at architecture, building structures that nobody had ever seen before in this country."

Wren lived through a tumultuous era spanning the Civil War and the execution of Charles I, the short-lived Commonwealth and the Restoration of the Monarchy, the Great Plague of London and the Great Fire that followed. He experienced great shifts in religion and society, from Puritan rule to the return of "Merry Monarch" Charles II, the accession of Catholic James II and the "Glorious Revolution" that brought Protestant William III and Mary II to the throne. He witnessed the brief reign of Queen Anne, who granted Wren a house at Hampton Court, then, in his final years, the dawn of the Georgian era. >

Greenwich Hospital

The Great Hall, Royal Hospital Chelsea, home of the Chelsea Pensioners

Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street, Oxford

> Christopher Wren was born on 20 October 1632 in East Knoyle, a small village in Wiltshire, where his father was rector. It's believed he studied at Westminster School during the 1640s; he certainly learned mathematics in Bletchingdon, Oxfordshire, where the family relocated after the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1650, aged just 17, Wren entered Wadham College, Oxford, where he assisted in studies of anatomy. Indeed, late in life he lamented that he hadn't built a more lucrative medical career, though he was always at heart a numbers man: his motto was *Numero, pondere et mensura*: count, weigh and measure.

After graduating MA in 1653, Wren was elected to a fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, where he continued with anatomical work, as well as devising various inventions. But his focus increasingly turned skywards. In 1655, he collaborated on the development of a huge instrument for observing the whole of the face of the moon; six years later, at the age of just 28, he was elected to the Savilian chair of astronomy at Oxford – the most prestigious post in the country.

Attentive readers will have noticed a distinct absence of any mention of architecture here. Surprising as it seems now, the subject wasn't part of his studies or professional academic life. "Architecture was very fashionable among clever gentry at that time," explains Tinniswood. "Take John Vanbrugh [who designed Blenheim Palace] – he was a tea merchant and a playwright. Wren didn't see architecture as something essentially different from the mathematical sciences; it was just another problem to solve."

Following the Restoration of Charles II in May 1660, Wren came to the new monarch's attention, and his burgeoning interest in architecture began to find outlets. He became involved in plans to repair the near-ruined medieval St Paul's Cathedral, but it wasn't till 1663 – when he was 30 – that he received his first architectural commissions: the new chapel for Pembroke College, Cambridge, and a venue for academic ceremonies in Oxford, now known as the Sheldonian Theatre.

Having spent summer 1665 in Paris, studying science and architecture – and, coincidentally, avoiding the worst of the plague afflicting London that year – he returned to the capital in time for another pivotal event: the Great Fire of 1666. Though Wren's hugely ambitious scheme to rebuild the City on an entirely new street plan were rejected, he won the commission to rebuild St Paul's. "As far as we know, he was the first person in Britain to design a cathedral and see it through to completion in his lifetime," observes Tinniswood.

That monumental task was, though, far from his only focus over the following decades. Appointed surveyor of the King's works in 1669, he was responsible for building another 50 churches across the city to replace the 86 destroyed or damaged by the conflagration, and completed another five elsewhere in London. Several still stand, including St Stephen Walbrook – often cited as the finest – and St James's Church Piccadilly, probably Wren's own favourite, which he described as "beautiful and convenient".

Wren also built a new custom house, and the gold-topped Monument erected to commemorate the Great Fire, as well as the Royal Hospital Chelsea for military veterans and the Royal Hospital for Seamen (now known as Greenwich Hospital). He redeveloped parts of Hampton Court Palace, and transformed the

"Beautiful and convenient" – St James's Church, Piccadilly was Wren's favourite church

CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL

The domed behemoth that today graces Ludgate Hill is the fifth cathedral to stand on this spot. The first, Saxon St Paul's, dedicated in AD 604, went up in smoke – as did two successors. The fourth, begun in the late 11th century and known by Wren's time as Old St Paul's, was already a tumbledown medieval structure by the time he became involved in restoring – really, rescuing – it in the early 1660s. In spring 1666, he proposed adding a mighty dome as "so remarkable an ornament to this mighty city". In the event, the Great Fire intervened.

The infamous blaze that tore through the city from 2 September 1666 destroyed some 13,200 buildings, leaving St Paul's a roofless wreck. Now Wren had his chance – but such a huge project was neither quick nor cheap. It wasn't till 1675 that a design was approved, and construction began in June that year. Frustrated by the authorities' caution, Wren took to heart Charles II's suggestion that he might make "ornamental variations". His design evolved as the stones piled high; today's St Paul's looks nothing like the so-called Warrant Design.

The first service was held on 2 December 1697, and by 1700 the base of the dome was taking shape. The gilded ball and cross topping the dome's lantern, 111.5 metres above street level, were finally added in 1708; three years later the cathedral was declared complete. Wren, who was in his late 70s, himself recognised the magnificence of his achievement, writing: "And if I glory, it is in the singular mercy of God, who has enabled me to begin and finish my great work so conformable to the ancient mode."

A composite half-section, half-plan and half-elevation of two versions of a 16-bay dome drawn by Wren and Hawksmoor; St Paul's today

Christopher Wren: The Quest for Knowledge is a special exhibition exploring Wren's early life, his scientific experiments, the building of St Paul's and his legacy throughout the centuries. Open from spring 2023 in the Crypt, on display will be Wren's personal artefacts and his ambitious architectural models for St Paul's as well as the rebuilding of the City of London, drawings from the collections and archives of St Paul's, RIBA and the Royal Society.

Entry included in sightseeing admission; visit stpauls.co.uk to book.

Jacobean Nottingham House into Kensington Palace. At Winchester he designed a colossal palace for Charles II – a "new Versailles" – though it was never completed. He was clearly doing something right, as on 14 November 1674 he was knighted.

His influence spread far and wide. "He was the arbiter of architectural taste for nearly half a century in Britain and beyond," says Tinniswood. "I've stood in churches in New England that I could swear were designed by Wren. They weren't – but they were by craftsmen who'd learned their trade under him then crossed to America."

Tastes change, though, in architecture as in art and fashion. So it was for Wren: even during his lifetime his works were criticised, and by the mid-1720s the Palladian style dominated, a trend that continued through the Georgian era and into the Victorian. It wasn't until the end of the 19th century that his work was reappraised, sparking something of a "Wrenaissance".

Like others of his class and education, Wren dabbled in politics ("Architecture has its political use," he said), representing Plympton St Maurice, Devon, in the 1680s and, briefly in 1701-02, Melcombe Regis in Dorset.

So much for the work. But who was Sir Christopher Wren? Sadly, we know much less about his inner life. In 1669 he married Faith Coghill, who he might have encountered while a boy living at Bletchingdon. One letter from Wren to his future wife survives, sent (probably in June 1669) along with a watch she'd dropped in water and which he had arranged to be repaired. It contains proclamations of his ardour: "every Beating of the Ballance will tell you 'tis the pulse of my Heart, which labours as much to serve you and more trewly than the Watch." Faith died of smallpox just six years later, leaving one surviving son, also Christopher. The architect remarried after less than 18 months, but his second wife, Jane, also died young, in October 1680.

All in all, Wren the man remains largely a mystery. "I suspect he was quite a clubbable fellow – he seemed to spend most of his life in coffee houses around the Square Mile," observes Tinniswood. "But to be honest, though I think I know more about Christopher Wren than anybody else, even I don't really know him at all."

Letters, notes and memoirs reveal little about Wren's likes and dislikes, his relationships or his other interests. Ultimately, his work overshadows everything. Perhaps it is fitting, then, to look to the great man himself for the final word.

After passing away at his son's house in Westminster on 25 February 1723, apparently after catching a cold, Wren was buried on 5 March 1723 beneath a simple black marble slab in the crypt beneath his magnum opus, St Paul's Cathedral. Above it, a plaque bears a short epitaph in Latin, with the powerful words: *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice* – "if you seek his memorial, look around you."

For details of all celebratory events, visit: wren300.org

Images: Shutterstock, Alamy, The Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, Angelo Hornak

POST BOX

Write to us at: "Post Box", This England Magazine, 185 Fleet Street, London, EC4A 2HS or email editor@thisengland.co.uk

Deborah Kerr as Katherine Parr

WINTER MUSINGS

I haven't finished going through the winter issue, received today, but already have two comments:

Page 52 – Katherine Parr was portrayed by Deborah Kerr in the movie *Young Bess* made about Elizabeth I with Charles Laughton as Henry VIII and Jean Simmons as Elizabeth. Stewart Granger also starred, as Seymour. I saw that movie a long time ago and believe that despite some "twists" it was a pretty good film.

Page 53 – Mr Smith is of course quite right to wonder about such an unusual meaning of the needle in the haystack. Something valuable? Nonsense. It's always meant a difficult if not impossible search. As for the saying about the camel and the needle, didn't *This England* already have an item on this years ago, saying that it wasn't a "camel", but a thick rope. I forget the exact spellings for the original language. It makes more sense if you think about a thick rope. What does a camel have to do with a needle?

Also on that theme, you had an item about "Kiss me, Hardy", but there has long been a thread about the possibility that the right phrase was "Kismet, Hardy", which too makes more sense. However, there are items which state that this wasn't even Nelson's last uttering. History is tough!

Language changes can be confusing. For example, "bring forward" when I was working in businesses always meant that you would mark something BF for a later date – ie a more appropriate time to deal with the matter in hand. Now there seems to be confusion about that.

Anita Kern, Toronto

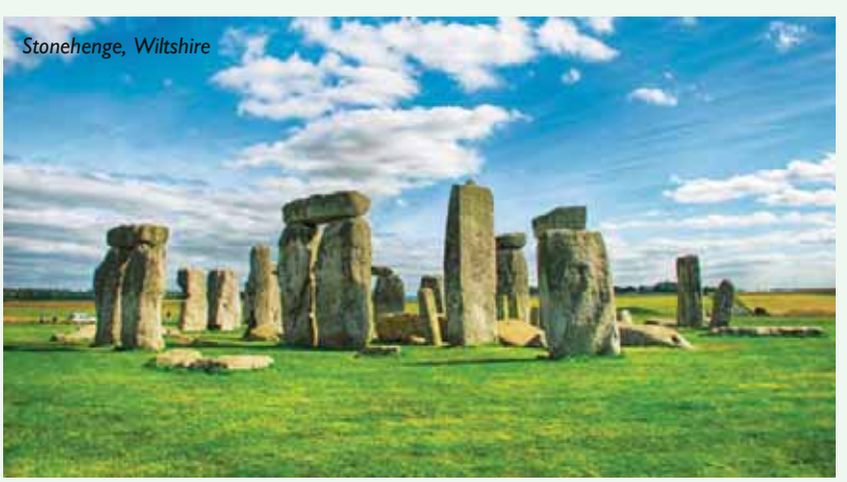
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

This England, our green and pleasant land, has a rich range of historic heritage to visit with something of interest for all whether it be castle, cathedral or ancient monument. Having seen all of what London has to offer, my Nepalese friend Nalini yearned to see Stonehenge. It was my first visit as well. She was fascinated to know that the stone circles are older than the pyramids and we both found the whole historical experience enthralling.

It's a matter of preference as to what's best to visit, so there can be no "historian's winner" in a futile war of words (*Cornucopia, TE Winter 2022*).

P.S. I never tire of visiting Canterbury Cathedral. Nor other places in Kent, the most historic county in England, with tales of Roman invasion, St Augustine and Christianity, castles, the Cinque Ports, Battle of Britain. Hop fields and beer in the Garden of England.

Don Austen, by email



Stonehenge, Wiltshire

POETRY IN SONG

With reference to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem *Crossing the Bar* (*TE Summer 2022*), I have it as a beautiful, sensitive song by David Milton on his *Songs from the Bell Man* CD. This is fairly recent and worth buying.

Winifred Richard, Keynsham, Bristol

RESTORED MEMORIAL

Our church here in Fifehead Magdalen, Dorset, contains a memorial to the Newman family. The memorial is dated about 1750 and was carved by Sir Henry Cheere who is responsible for some nine memorials in Westminster Abbey. Cheere lived next door to the Newman "town house" in Old Palace Yard, Westminster, so the two families knew each other.

The restored memorial at St Mary Magdalene church

The memorial has recently been handsomely restored at the cost of some £35,000 which was raised from charitable sources and a contribution from the Newman family living in America. The restoration work was carried out by Sally Strachey Historic Conservation and they did a splendid job.

It occurred to me that this restoration project might be of interest to your readers.

Andrew Duncan, Gillingham, Dorset

AS REGULAR AS CLOCKWORK

For me, Sunday school (*TE Spring 2022*) was not so much about deepening my relationship with my creator as winning the annual attendance prize.

In the 1940s our village acquired a new parson, the Rev G.A. Pare. It was only later I learnt he had been a padre with the troops that fought at Arnhem and what a brave and resourceful man he was: there are glowing references to him in Antony Beevor's book *Arnhem*.

He set about waking up our sleepy community: he reorganised the Scouts and Guides, building a new Scout hut; he paid us children to sing in the church choir – thrupence a week, the money saved and spent on our annual outing to Wicksteed Park; and he offered an annual prize for the best boy/girl attender at Sunday school.

I loved books: my father brought home boxes of books he bought from the big house sales that happened after World War II. Poems, novels, a 12-volume history of the Great War filled with photos and artists' impressions of the battles; and large watercolour-tinted books of horse racing, hunting and caricatures of the rich and famous.

Now, the pages would be removed, framed and sold for large sums in antique shops. They all fascinated me but I didn't have any books of my own and the Sunday school prize seemed a good opportunity to collect some.

Over four years I didn't miss many Sundays; regardless of whether it was wet, or better still, snowy, I was in church collecting my tick in the register. Other children stayed at home; I didn't. Poor Parson Pare: each year he read out, "The winner for best attender is Roy Jones – again!" I didn't care; I had another book to devour. I still have them on my shelves.

Roy Jones, Quorn, Leicestershire

NEWSPAPERS IN SALISBURY

I have been an avid reader of *This England* for many years, following in the footsteps of my father who also subscribed in the 1980s and 1990s. I have always enjoyed the articles, most likely due to the fact that I am a non-UK resident and now have very few relatives in the UK.

In the *Autumn 2022* issue, I read Derek Lamb's article on Youthful Enterprise and it reminded me about my Sunday newspaper round in Salisbury in the 1960s.

At 6 am my mother would wake me and while I got dressed, made a pot of tea. I was not allowed out of the house without a cup of tea and a biscuit! I would then cycle down to the newsagent. There was very little traffic; few people were about apart from other lads on bikes heading for the newsagent.

In the shop, the papers were sorted into the various rounds. Each paper was marked with the street and house number in the top right-hand corner before being placed in a large grey newspaper bag. These linen bags – originally white, blackened with newsprint – carried the names of well-known newspapers. Each "paper boy" had his own route and when his bag was ready, he struggled out of the shop. My round was not all that long so my bag was never particularly heavy.

I had to deliver to a couple of small hotels, including the Mill Race Hotel. The door was always open and there was a small lounge with a fireplace and armchairs, a reception desk and in the centre, a large round antique table. I had to leave the newspapers on this table – I never saw anyone and the only sound was the slow ticking of the grandfather clock!

Passing the mill where the road narrowed, the row of Edwardian houses was next on my list. These had bay windows and long front gardens. One house had the letterbox positioned quite low and I had to get down on my knees – a small dog would grab the paper as soon as I started to push it through . . . I never knew whether the owner got his morning paper intact!

I have always loved the view from these houses across a small park and so I would walk out on to the Long Bridge hoping to spot fish in the clear water of the chalk stream. From the bridge I would look out at the cathedral spire rising above the trees, a scene that had changed little from the time of John Constable.

Dr Adrian C. Sewell, Germany, by email >

Paper boys like Adrian, off on their rounds in the 1960s

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

Charles Smith shares his memories of the Last Night of the Proms.

Aged 11, I was put in the care of an aunt who probably shaped the outcome of my life and my love of classical music. My aunt, who was a pianist, soon saw the potential in my voice. I was sent to a professional singer for training. In the church choir, as my confidence grew, I became the soprano soloist. I continued to entertain at various local chapels until my voice broke, and I never sang in public again.

In recent years, visits to the Royal Albert Hall have included Yo-Yo Ma's enchanting rendition of Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, Catrin Finch's harp and the Halle orchestra's superb playing of the *1812 Overture*.

In 2004 I decided to treat myself to a mini Proms season to attend concerts on two consecutive nights in order to spend the day between, visiting museums and art galleries. The two hour train journey is a great way to unwind and prepare for the delights ahead and watch the changing scenery en route.

Included in the Proms were one of my favourite symphonies, Beethoven's 9th, and a late night with Sir John Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple*. Dame Evelyn Glennie left us all spellbound as she dashed from one instrument to another. The long-lasting applause showed the appreciation of such a gifted lady.

Then came the Last Night that I had enjoyed many times on the television.

Charles dressed as Charlie Chaplin

To add to the vast array of costumes in the audience I decided to dress as Charlie Chaplin.

I took the short walk through Kensington Gardens to the Royal Albert Hall. As I left the west carriageway behind, a shout from a cab driver told me I looked the part, acknowledged with a wave of my walking stick.

Audience chatter reduced to a murmur as the BBC orchestra and chorus assembled, followed by baritone Sir Thomas Allen with conductor Leonard Slatkin taking a bow, to a very warm welcome.

Having attended the inauguration of the organ after restoration, I was pleased to see organist Simon Preston taking his seat in the console, high above the stage. I could hardly wait to hear once again the thunderous explosion from its 999 pipes.

The varied programme in the first part included *Carnival Overture* by Dvořák, composer Samuel Barber's Proms premier *Toccata Festival* and, the rich baritone voice of Sir Thomas Allen singing *Five Mystical Songs*. We were also treated to exerts from Richard Rodgers' *Oklahoma,* and *Kiss Me, Kate* by Cole Porter.

After the interval there followed a build-up to the grand finale of yet another popular proms season, first with a light hearted speech from the conductor. The much-loved perennials of Edward Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory* and *Jerusalem* by Hubert Parry, allowed the voices of the almost 5,000-strong audience to attempt to raise the roof, a sound never to be forgotten. Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* ended with the stamping of feet by the prommers, in a race with the orchestra, which surely could only happen in the Royal Albert Hall.

Music was ringing in my ears as I walked back to the hotel and continued when travelling home on the early morning train. I had waited for so many years to be part of the Last Night of the Proms, with memories that I hope will stay with me but, having achieved one ambition and, with limited time left to fulfil future plans, this surely was Charlie's Last Night.

Charles Smith, Forest of Dean

MEMORIES OF BERWICK

Your article in *TE Winter 2022* on Berwick-upon-Tweed reminded me of when my dad was sent there in the late 1940s (plus my mum, my sister and me) on our return from his three-year army service in Austria. We were put in "16 married families hostel" stuck on the top of the cliffs. It was very beautiful but windy! Do any of your readers have any memories? I would love to hear.

Also your article on corporal punishment. While we were in Austria I went to an army school and girls as well as boys got the board rubber thrown at them, and the cane! We were all called by our surname but it was for me the best school I attended. I learnt a lot there, even how to fix a car. The headmaster said I should go to college but I ended up in an aqua show, then married to a military policeman.

Mrs Doreen Compton, Kent

Berwick-upon-Tweed

CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

Following Mervyn Jackson's letter about corporal punishment in the winter issue (Silence at the Back) responding to Brian Viner's school memories in autumn, many of you wrote in with your own experiences.

TIMES TABLES TERROR

I experienced two awful experiences at school – one at my infant school and one at my junior school in Hampshire. I did not deserve either, but I can't say I suffered too greatly from the experiences.

The first was aged seven on the last day of the last term at my infant school. Along with the other children in the leavers' class, I was instructed to write certain letters of the alphabet (I particularly remember "K" and "k") placing them next to each other so that the smaller one was written in the exact position (about halfway up) the capital outline. The purpose was to show that we had been taught to write correctly. When we had completed the exercise, we were sent outside the classroom where the headmistress scrutinised them. If they were not done to her liking, she gave us a number of smacks with a ruler on our hands and sent us back to repeat the test. I can't remember how many times I had to do it, or even if I got them right in the end, but I know I became more and more nervous, thus my handwriting probably deteriorated. I felt a strong feeling of resentment and injustice, but in those days (1956) we did not tell our parents about ill-treatment, as teachers were a respected authority.

The second incident was two or three years later at my junior school. I was not very good at mental arithmetic, so I became very anxious when the teacher asked various children in the class to ask another pupil a sum in the times tables. A girl who did not like me chose me. I think it was 9 x 7. I panicked because I didn't know it and got it wrong. The teacher then called me to the front and hit my hand with a ruler the number of times that was the sum of the answer. To this day I panic when I have to mentally multiply some of the larger times tables!

Susan Lambeth, by email

How did corporal punishment affect children?

HARD KNOCKS

I well recall the use of corporal punishment when at school. I witnessed the use of chalk, board rubber and ruler. Indeed, I fell prey to the wrath of the headteacher for exchanging some fascinating facts concerning verrucas with a young lady of my acquaintance whilst we should have been concentrating on our role as angels (or was it choir boys) during the school nativity play. At home I also received the sharp end of my mother's tongue who had been in the audience that evening. Returning to secondary level, a maths master who had a disability in his hand used this to great effect on any pupils head he considered to have transgressed.

I agree with Mr Jackson that there are issues with schools and the behaviour of young people. But I would hasten to note that even in my day, schools could be a place of fear, and at times unruly behaviour. I also now look at the end products of an education system where corporal punishment was considered acceptable. I am referring to people of my age. I have sadly learnt from bitter experience that people of my own age can have an over developed sense of entitlement, and scant regard for the law, or the needs of others. I have also learnt that those not educated in the days of corporal punishment can be kind, caring people with a better developed sense of social justice. Yes, I well recall an education system that was better ordered. But were the adults leaving this system any better?

Paul Davenport, Gloucestershire

VICTORIAN VALUES

Corporal punishment in the 1940s was common in both home and school where I lived. My father and grandfather were shepherds living in tied cottages. My father had lumbago and sciatica pains which led to short tempers.

My brother liked making fires and always had a box of matches in a pocket. One evening smoke was seen rising from one of the storage sheds and my alarmed parents raced to the scene. There, under the straw-covered roof, my brother was kneeling in front of flames and smoke.

Fortunately, the fire was put out. However by this time father's temper had risen. He wore a heavy leather belt and it was taken off, the 12-year-old boy was grabbed and put over a knee. After that, my brother never carried matches and the belt was never used again.

I was destined to have some myself when I moved to Grammar school. I had been caught by the headmaster when we boys were throwing our plimmies around. The head marched me to his room, retrieved his bamboo cane and promptly gave "six of the stingiest best" to my trousered backside.

At the end of that first year I actually took the form prize as being best in class, so perhaps a bit of CP did some good?

Jim Groves, Sutton, Cheam

GOING FOR GOLD

At around 12 years old I became what was called a "weekly boarder" at a boys' school in Harrogate. The headmaster enjoyed using his cane and I added ticks to the back page of my French exercise book to record each event. When my father announced it was time to move schools the ticks had grown in number to 98. In a farewell speech to the head, I asked for two more strokes so I could boast of having reached 100. He just turned around and walked away!

Andrew Renton, Vancouver

RIDING HIGH

With only roughly 33 side-saddle makers nationwide, William Gibson discovers what it takes from Master Saddler Clare Barnett

OFF a country lane on the Hampshire-Dorset border, in a small workshop redolent of leather and hardly bigger than an average garden shed, is Bearhouse Saddlery. Shelves full of tools and equipment line the walls and the rafters are hung with assorted saddles and leather goods.

Clare Barnett is a Master Saddler, qualified saddle fitter and, with husband Peter, proprietor of the saddlery. She was previously a nurse, who, after being injured in a road accident, decided to follow up on a previous interest in leatherwork and signed up for a course with the doyen of hand stitching leatherwork, Valerie Mitchell in Tetbury. Once the techniques were mastered she set about producing a range of items for sale including wallets, handbags, briefcases and sporting goods. Soon seeking a new challenge, and being from a family of keen riders, her next step was obvious: saddlery. The leathers were different but the basic techniques were similar and the work gave the same level of job satisfaction.

Clare with instructor Chloe Marsh on her horse Cow Pony, 2019, at the Royal Windsor Horse Show. Clare's daughter made the red costume

Being too old for an apprenticeship she enrolled instead at the Saddlery Training Centre in Salisbury. Then followed seven years in the workshop which meant she qualified as a Master Saddler so was then able to teach Peter the craft. Now he, too, is a Master Saddler, specialising in sporting goods.

Still seeking to increase her knowledge and skills, Clare easily identified an area of the trade lacking adequate provision. From her own riding experience and attendance at shows she was aware that there was a shortage of side-saddles and that interest in side-saddle riding has recently revived. Very few side-saddles are being made in Britain and tend to be very expensive, probably twice the cost of a standard saddle. Many riders seek out antiques from sale rooms or forgotten equipment tucked away in lofts. The next obvious step then was to learn the art of side-saddle construction and repair.

Clare successfully applied for a scholarship with the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST), a charity founded in 1990 by the Royal Warrant Holders' Association to "fund the education and training of craftsmen and women who want to improve their craft and trade skill." For Clare this meant heading back to Salisbury for tuition by Richard Godden, the last remaining side-saddle maker to have worked for probably the greatest name in side-saddle production, Champion and Wilton dissolved in 2000.

Mr Godden, although now in his 80s, is still as keen as ever to share his skill and knowledge with students and in the summer of 2013, Clare obtained the qualification she was seeking and was entered on the QEST list of alumni.

To distribute the weight of a rider any saddle has to be built on a firm foundation, a frame of wood and metal known as a tree. A protective layer of webbing is fitted over the frame. Above this is a layer of sheep's wool, quilted into place under a layer of serge. Beneath the tree, next to the horse's back, is a cushion stuffed with more wool or flock. The whole is then wrapped in leather, with every seam and joint hand stitched. The final additions stitched into place are the saddle flaps on either side.

The leather worker's main skill lies in hand stitching, using a variety of needles of differing sizes. The position of rows of stitch holes are marked with a pricking punch and the holes then made with an awl. Success in stitching depends largely on the tension of the thread. Too tight and it will cut or crinkle the leather; too loose and it will be impractical and untidy. A wide range of man-made fibres is available for stitching but most traditional saddlers prefer "home-made" options. This is done by twisting together a number of strong linen strands to make one thread which is then coated in beeswax.

The side-saddle tree has to include two projections (leather covered "hooks") on the nearside. The rider rests her right leg over the top pommel and places her left leg under the lower one as her left foot goes into the stirrup. Some of the side-saddles brought to Clare for repair are 100 years old, a credit to the original makers like the Owen brand. These usually have to be stripped right back

to the tree then reconstructed. Horses are fitted in a similar way to an astride saddle. Clare is currently in the process of creating a tree to her own design.

The most used skins in the UK are from cattle, though the different skins from deer, goats and pigs are also used for different purposes. The most call is for cowhide, different parts of which have different uses. In saddlery the rear of cattle, or butts, provides the best quality, thick enough to be split into layers, the top of which is full grain leather. This retains its natural appearance, meaning any natural imperfections, stains or scarring remain. The hide from the front of the cow, the shoulder, is thinner, can be sanded or polished smooth and is perfect for making more domestic items like briefcases, handbags and so on. The finest leather in Clare's collection is doe skin, mainly sourced from Germany. This is used to form the seat of side saddles, being light and soft but not shiny or slippery like full grain leather.

To convert a skin to leather it is first scraped to remove hair, flesh and grease. It is then tanned to create a pliable product able to survive wetting without putrefaction. The most common tanning agents are salts of chromium, aldehyde chemical compounds and vegetable (natural tannins). Clare favours the latter, preferring to buy her finished leather from J&FJ Baker & Co from Colyton in Devon, the only remaining tannery to specialise in oak bark tanning.

A side-saddle ready to go

Peter and Joanna ascertaining how many cups of tea it will take to restore that saddle!

It was at a "have a go" clinic where riders can try out side-saddle, many for the first time, that a Sergeant said to Clare it was just for girls.

"It was just the worst thing he could have said to me. Many amputees coming back from World War I were cavalry men and they did everything side-saddle – racing, jumping, hunting. Learning side-saddle was part of their rehabilitation."

Clare and the team challenged the Sergeant on Facebook to learn to ride side-saddle and race in the seven furlong flat dash at the annual Larkhill point to point, Wiltshire. Clare had organised the first race with the help of a group of side-saddle ladies fabulously known as the Wonky Outlaws and it has since become an annual fixture raising a great deal of money for the Royal Artillery Charitable Trust. The Sergeant agreed, though two weeks before the race was injured falling from a horse. "We had to get another man to ride in the race last minute!" Clare laughs, who by this stage was determined to have a man compete alongside the ladies.

Larkhill isn't England's only side-saddle race. Perhaps the best known is the Dianas of the Chase, a side-saddle steeplechase famed around the world and held at Ingarsby Old Hall, Leicestershire. Competitors face 14 jumps that rival the Grand National in scale and number, requiring no shortage of grit. It certainly overturns any notion that side-saddle belongs to an era of Victorian ladies in bonnets and long skirts.

But, what of the future of the craft? Basic instruction is now available at Capel Manor College in Enfield, who provide a two year diploma course aimed at complete beginners. Trainees with some experience can attend at Salisbury but in both cases an apprenticeship to a Master Saddler follows.

There is limited funding available to support apprentices and during their training they have to be paid the minimum wage, a big financial commitment for a small business and a demand on the Master's own working time.

Some Government funding is available to employers but only for a limited period. Some help can be provided direct to the apprentice from the Millennium Apprentice Fund, from the Worshipful Company of Saddlers, but again this is limited. Clare's trainee, Joanna, was a Millennium apprentice and QEST scholar and has recently completed the exams and practical tests leading to qualification as a saddler. It is likely that newcomers to the trade will find it increasingly difficult to secure apprenticeships.

The biggest future need is for more side-saddle makers (Clare is one of only 33 members who are side-saddle specialists of the Society of Master Saddlers in the UK) so that is where training needs to be targeted. Clare spends two days a week in the workshop and two out fitting saddles, when Peter occupies the workshop. As well as a wide range of handmade leatherwork, much made to order, Clare sells and fits "brand" saddles as well as repairing almost anything made of leather, unless it is of inferior quality. Then she will advise on alternatives.

The ever-increasing number of side-saddle riders in particular looking for help will always find a warm welcome at the Bearhouse Saddlery.

bearhousesaddlery.co.uk

Julian Calder taken from A Celebration of British Craftsmanship (Impress, 2018), *William Gibson*

THE HOME OF SNOOKER

How Sheffield's Crucible Theatre became associated with snooker and some of the sport's most thrilling matches, as recalled by Dene Bebbington

The Crucible will forever be associated with snooker

MOST sports have a venue that they're forever associated with. Football has Wembley, cricket has Lord's and tennis has Wimbledon. For snooker, its champions are forged at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield. Gracious host of the Snooker World Championship since 1977, the Crucible is synonymous with this pinnacle event in snooker. With this year's World Championship taking place from 15 April-1 May, the venue is primed for the annual crowds of fans eager to see the drama of the competition unfold.

Before the Crucible, the first 50 years of the Snooker World Championship saw the event take place at a variety of venues. In some years matches were played in more than one destination, as in 1976 when both Middlesbrough and Manchester hosted. Neither of these were ideal, especially Manchester's Wythenshawe Forum, which was likened to an aircraft hangar. With the World Championships hanging in the balance, businessman and professional snooker player Mike Watterson made it his mission to find a suitable venue. After his wife attended a play at the Crucible Theatre, she suggested it could be the perfect place. However, Watterson was concerned that the small theatre's modest stage wouldn't be big enough for two snooker tables, with a minimum of 36 feet needed for the playing space around the tables, and a partition in between.

In a stroke of luck that was set to change the course of snooker history, the stage manager confirmed it to be exactly the right size. With the new venue secured, the Crucible's debut in 1977 was a great success, both on and off the table.Two-time world champion John Spencer won his third and last world title, and the event attracted increased ticket sales and television coverage.

The theatre proved popular with fans, who could easily see the tables, with the furthest only 22 metres away. This close proximity to the table allowed the public to see every reaction of players, allowing them to analyse who was composed and who was cracking under the pressure of the game. A few lucky fans in the front row are even within touching distance of players. Occasionally this proximity has caused friction, but it has also led to more light-hearted moments. In the 2018 final, Mark Williams, who went on to win the title, asked the nearest spectator to share his bag of sweets!

The World Championship is the most prestigious of the "Triple Crown", the three most distinguished tournaments in professional snooker, which include the Masters and the UK Championship. The World Championship finals, televised live on the BBC, have given us many gripping matches. I can still remember

Ronnie O'Sullivan has enjoyed many memorable moments at the venue

The Crucible has been the venue for the World Championship since 1977

watching six-time world champion Ray Reardon lose to the volatile Alex "Hurricane" Higgins in 1982. Higgins was one of the most exciting players of the day, known for his fast play; meanwhile, Reardon had an excellent all-round game and personality. Nicknamed "Dracula" because of his slicked-back hairstyle, Reardon was known for his relaxed approach, frequently joking with the audience in the intimate theatre. But this was not enough in this tense game against Higgins, who became known as the "people's champion".

However, if a single match could sum up the drama of snooker at the Crucible, it would have to be Steve Davis versus Dennis Taylor in the 1985 final. Watched by a record 18.5 million people on BBC2, the last game dragged on until 12.23am. Davis, already a three-time winner, was the defending champion and favourite to win. Amazingly, the result came down to the last black ball of the deciding game, when they were level pegging at 17 games each. The pressure of the competition was throwing both players off their game. With so much riding on this one ball, both players missed the black until Taylor finally potted it from a clear shot left open by Davis. One of the most legendary games at the Crucible, it is still talked about to this day.

Prior to 1977, when the World Championships were held elsewhere, three first-time snooker world champions successfully defended their title the following year. However, the Crucible has been a jinx for all first-time world champions since becoming the host of the competition, with none having broken the so-called "Crucible Curse". Even snooker legends Steve Davis, Stephen Hendry and Ronnie O'Sullivan have succumbed to it. Davis suffered the worst ill fortune with a shattering defeat in the very first round of 1982's tournament, narrowly avoiding a whitewash by losing 10-1 against Tony Knowles.

Snooker is both a game of dreams and of disappointments. Jimmy White is the best player never to have lifted the World Championship trophy, despite competing in six finals (five in consecutive years) and four semi-finals. His nemesis, Stephen Hendry, dominated the game in the 1990s and holds the record for having seven World Championship titles. The pair faced off in four finals at the Crucible, and in the post-match interview of the last of these in 1994, White famously joked, "He's beginning to annoy me."

Historically snooker has been most popular in the UK, with England having produced the most world champions. However, interest in the game has grown in Asia over the last few decades, particularly in China, which has held tournaments since the 1980s and is now the sport's biggest market. China has been keen to lure the World Championship away from Sheffield. Such is the Crucible's premier place in snooker that, in 2014, a replica of the theatre was built just outside Beijing in an ingenious but unsuccessful attempt to persuade the snooker authorities to relocate the tournament. Thanks to an agreement with Sheffield City Council, the snooker World Championship will continue to be held in the city at least until 2027, marking a 50-year anniversary of the city's association with the game. Whether all the remaining years will be hosted at the Crucible remains to be seen, with other venues in the city potential hosts. However, the bigger question is: will the so-called Crucible Curse ever be broken?

Images: Alamy, Shutterstock

AN ENGLISH BREW
THROUGH AND THROUGH

John Greeves visits Truro's Tregothnan Estate, the first place to grow tea on English soil

THE English are famous for their love of tea. A 2020 survey by Statista revealed that 7.45m people in the UK consume tea four times a day or more. However, as English as a cup of tea might seem, the product is largely imported from Asia, Africa and South America. Back in 1941, as war loomed and global supply chains were under threat, Sir Winston Churchill decreed that south west England should be covered with tea crops so that the country could become self-sufficient in tea growing. He would be delighted to know that today, Tregothnan House is home-growing English tea on the estate.

Tregothnan has been the historic seat of the Boscawen family since 1334, and has not shied away from new ventures through the years. From providing an official "safe site" for rare and endangered plants and trees from all over the world to being the first to grow ornamental camellias outdoors in the 1800s, this pioneering spirit now lives on in tea growing. Home to Britain's first tea gardens, Tregothnan's tea story began just over 20 years ago.

The estate has long been an expert camellia grower, having nurtured the plants for over two centuries. The estate's unique microclimate allows these flowers to flourish. By the 1990s, estate gardeners had the realisation that tea, which is a type of camellia, would also thrive here. Tregothnan's director Jonathon Jones says, "We have an 18 m-deep river at the bottom of the garden, and we are able to mimic Darjeeling conditions with our terrain, water and temperature."

The Indian town of Darjeeling is famous for its tea production in a warm and humid climate. At Tregothnan, the Falmouth estuary runs through the estate, which enjoys exceptionally warm conditions, often

Jonathon Jones is passionate about tea

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR TEA?

Tregothnan has a wide variety of teas on offer.
From classic English tea to Earl Grey, Manuka tea to nettle tea, this is a tea lover's paradise.
The differences in the many varieties of tea is all in the process the leaves go through. Generally the basic differences in the various forms of tea are:

- **White teas are plucked and dried**
- **Green teas are steamed and dried**
- **Oolong are lightly roasted and then dried**
- **Black teas are roasted and then dried**
- **Pu-erh teas are a form of black tea that is fermented**

To browse Tregothnan's impressive tea selection, go to: **tregothnan.co.uk**

The tea garden at Tregothnan

reaching temperatures even higher than those in Darjeeling. The tea plant flourishes here because cool mists protect the tea bushes in the cooler winter months and the humid air removes any damaging saltiness from the estuary.

Tea growing began on the estate in 1999. The kitchen garden was chosen as the best site to trial this tricky crop. It had a high protective wall on one side and thick shrubbery on the other. After a few calamities (early storms uprooted the first baby bushes) 300 bushes were at last established.

Growing tea is always challenging in the early years. The soil conditions need to be just right, with a specific pH, a minimum amount of rain and constant weed removal required. Throughout the year, conditions must be largely frost-free and not too cold. Equally, too much sun can lead to sunburn on the leaves. While it can take around six or seven years for good conditions to be established, this will then see bushes likely to produce tea for the next 400-500 years.

The very first harvest at Tregothnan in 2005 produced just 28 grams of tea. Today, hundreds of tons of tea are produced annually. Up to 20,000 tea bushes are planted across the estate every year to produce both herbal and black tea. Jonathon says, "Camellia sinensis is still regarded as the parent tea bush, but we have over 35 tea varieties from that species including ones we've bred ourselves from our own seedlings."

The estate is currently investing in larger processing and packing facilities to allow them to produce more tea than ever before.

The tea growing process is a lengthy one, which starts with Camellia sinensis cuttings.

"In early September we take cuttings from named cultivated varieties which we have selected ourselves for optimum taste, productivity, processing and all the other essential qualities," Jonathon says. The cuttings are then sent off to the nursery propagating site.

Propagation is a very specialised process and requires immense care and attention. Cuttings are regarded as semi-ripe when they start to send out roots. They then remain in the nursery >

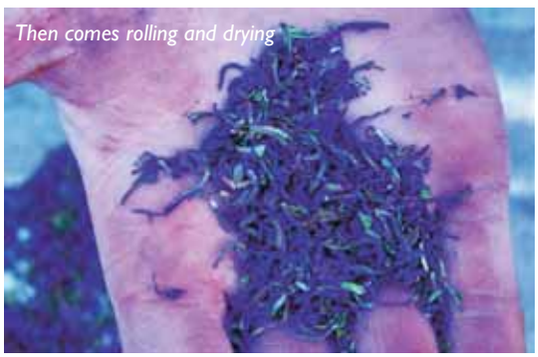
The teabot can pluck tea leaves much faster while safeguarding quality

The bush to cup process takes 36 hours

The Halwyn tea garden is on the edge of the Fal Estuary

Withering is a key part of the process

Leaves are oxidised



Then comes rolling and drying

> over winter to develop. In the spring they are potted up and remain in the nursery until October, just over 12 months before they are planted out. Up to 25,000 juvenile bushes are taken straight from the nursery to the field at this time of year. It then becomes a waiting game for five to six years as the tea bushes become established. This consists of watering, lots of weeding, feeding and a little pruning as time passes.

"You'll probably lose 20 per cent of the plants, and that's just normal for tea. Sometimes it could be worse, and so you have to replace the ones you've lost," Jonathon says.

From year six or seven, harvesting can start. From then on it's only a case of care and maintenance. The main season for harvesting tea is from April to October. The estate has recently developed a robotic picker, called a "teabot", which can harvest leaves a hundred times faster than the human hand while still maintaining the quality of the plant.

After cultivation, a five-step process of making tea begins and this bush to cup process takes just 36 hours. Many of the steps are still done by hand, with much of the technique having scarcely changed since people first began harvesting tea. After the tea is picked, usually at dawn to mimic Darjeeling conditions, the leaves are laid on bamboo mats and allowed to gently wither in a warm environment. The leaves become limp and pliable during this stage of the process.

Next, rolling is a crucial stage. This ruptures the cells in the leaf and releases natural juices and chemicals from within. The more intense the rolling, the stronger the resulting flavour is as the leaves become broken and bruised. The next step is oxidisation. The rolled leaves are spread out on a flat surface and kept at a controlled temperature. As the liquids in the cells interact, the colour changes from green to brown. The final stage is drying. Once the leaves have reduced to a darkened crispy state, they are ready for drinking.

Visitors to the estate can be a part of the tea production process with the new International Tea Centre. Tour the gardens and hand pick, process and taste your own tea, an experience offered nowhere else in Europe. The centre also serves as the country's national tea research centre, with scientists researching this much-loved drink on site.

Jonathon is passionate about giving back to the tea industry, and sharing it with others.

"I've had great support from the tea industry and people from all over the world who have always been helpful and open to us. In return I want to make the tea industry central to the UK and provide a hands on experience for people," he said.

Tregothnan may not be able to compete in volume with major tea producers, but what they do provide is a luxury English tea experience which they are eager to share with everyone.

tregothnan.co.uk

TAKING TEA

Taking tea was a fashionable practice during the 1840s

It was during the reign of King Charles II and Queen Catherine of Braganza in the 1600s that tea was first imported into Britain. A favourite drink of the Queen, it was shipped by the East India Company who at the time monopolised the UK trade with China and India, beating any rivals by ensuring other companies could not legally import tea cargoes. Tax on tea at that time was extortionate and it was very much a drink for the affluent.

By 1785, however, the government had reduced the tax making it more affordable. Soon, the general population was replacing their usual breakfast beverage, perhaps milk or small beer (an ale with low alcoholic content), with tea, and from then on its popularity grew rapidly.

London coffee houses, the first opened in 1652, soon began serving tea to their clientele. When in the same decade a pioneering coffee house began selling tea that could be brewed at home, this was welcomed, especially by ladies who would not be seen gracing such an establishment.

However, not everyone was happy that tea was available to all. A pamphlet called *The Good and Bad Effects of Tea Consider'd* appeared in 1745, stating that tea drinking was fine for the middle and upper classes, but should not be available for "persons of an inferior rank and means".

The anonymous author suggests that tea drinking in the afternoon by working class women would lead them to neglect their duties such as spinning and knitting, and their children would be dressed in rags whilst they would gossip around the town about their superiors. "Why!" the writer expostulates, "They would complain about their hard working husbands and the artful husseys might also drink spirits."

From the start, ceremony was very much part of tea drinking, with the great and the good partaking in an afternoon repast with friends, the lady of the house serving from a silver teapot whilst the finest bone china cups and saucers were laid out to be admired. It is believed one of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, Anna Maria Russell, began the tradition of afternoon tea, as we think of it now, in the 1840s. Evening meals were served much later than they are today, and something was needed to fill the gap between lunch and dinner. Consequently, the duchess ordered that in the late afternoon, a drink of tea be served along with buttered bread and cakes. It didn't take long for the tradition to be taken up by her contemporaries as the stylish thing to do. One tradition arising from that era of delicate teacups is that milk was always poured first, to stop the cup cracking when boiling hot tea was added.

By the mid-1800s tea drinking was well established, with cheaper prices meaning most people could enjoy it. For wealthier Victorians, it was all about possessions and the need to impress. Who had the best porcelain and teapot, the latest silver tea urn and the most impressive table linen? A popular snack served with tea at this time was, of course, Victoria sponge. By the late 19th century tea-gowns were very popular, dresses specifically made for afternoon tea, and gloves were no longer de rigueur.

The tea bag made its first appearance in America around 1908, when a New York tea merchant, Thomas Sullivan, started the trend. Sending samples of tea in small silk bags out to his customers, the recipients had dropped them into a cup and topped them with boiling water, not realising the tea should first be removed. The idea soon caught on, and by the 1920s mesh bags similar to filter paper were substituted, along with the familiar string and cardboard tab.

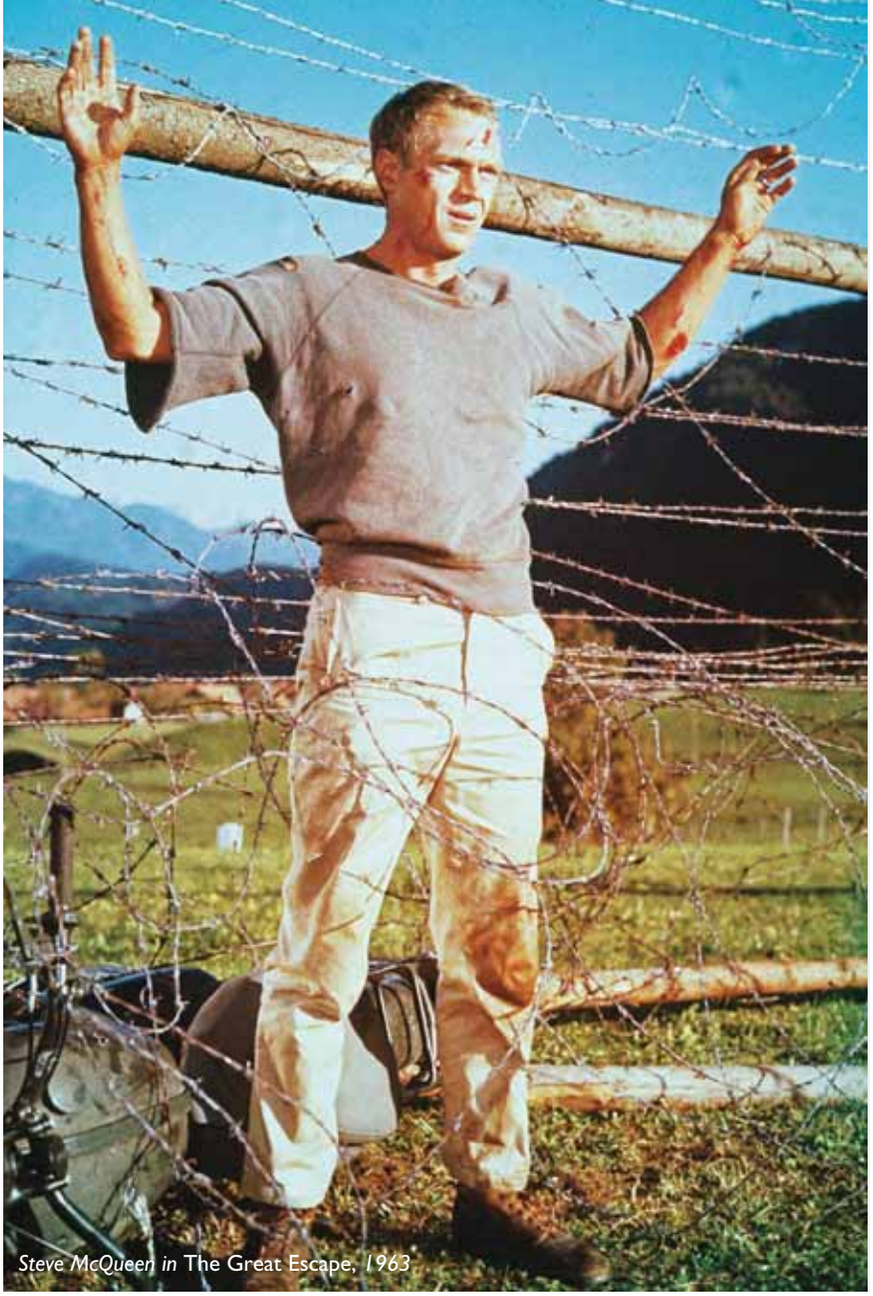
It took a while for Britain to adopt tea bags, a factor being material shortages during World War II. Production was slow but by the 1950s demand was growing and it was in 1953 that Tetley's introduced the first version in Britain, rapidly followed by other tea companies.

Today loose tea still has its devotees and serving afternoon tea has seen a resurgence with cafés, hotels and restaurants offering dainty cakes, sandwiches and scones served on fine china cake stands along with pots of loose-leaf tea.

JAN JOHNSTONE

Afternoon tea is the perfect thing to tide you over until dinner

Images: Tregothnan, Alamy, Shutterstock



Steve McQueen in The Great Escape, *1963*

DIGGING DEEP

Eighty years ago an audacious mass POW escape was conceived – the Great Escape. Amanda Hodges explores its dramatic evolution

IT was a chilly moonless March night in 1944 and something momentous was underway at the snow-covered Stalag Luft III POW camp. Situated in what was then Germany, today Poland, the Luftwaffe-run camp south-east of Berlin housed predominantly Allied airmen. Nearly 200 of them were crouching in hut 104 in the dark, awaiting their signal to enter the 336-foot tunnel based here and begin their journey towards freedom.

But nothing was going to plan. An air raid siren had been sounded, the tunnel was taking longer to navigate than expected and, worst of all, when the first man popped his head up from the mouth of the tunnel, he found himself not inside the safety of the nearby trees as hoped, but many feet short, marooned between wire and woods close to a watchtower. What would happen to the venture later dubbed "The Great Escape"?

It had been more than a year in the planning. Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, the very competent South African who flew with Britain's RAF, a serial escapee and former lawyer, was in charge of the operation initially begun in spring 1943. Named "Big X", he had "the mind of a filing cabinet" according to Paul Brickhill, former POW who wrote the book on which the film was based, and he'd decided that the best way to disrupt the German war effort was a mass escape rather than the usual slow dribble of prisoners breaking free.

Stalag Luft was supposed to be escape-proof, with watchtowers (dubbed "Goontowers" by inmates), barbed wire fences, a guard dog and huts raised above ground so that nothing could easily be dug below. But for ingenious, energetic young POWs, nicknamed "kriegies" from the German *Kriegsgefangene* (prisoners of war), nothing was impossible. The guards were referred to by POWs as "goons"; unaware of the perjorative connotation, they accepted the nickname after being told that it stood for "German Officer Or Non-Com!"

This was a camp run by a humane member of the Luftwaffe, Kommandant Friedrich Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau, staunchly anti-Nazi, who adhered to the Geneva Convention forbidding harsh treatment of POWs. Here they tried to harness the men's energy and provide an outlet for inevitable frustration; hours, in the words of former Boer War POW Winston Churchill, moving like "paralytic centipedes" for these men. Despite woeful quantities of decent food, the place was equipped with sports facilities, a library and even a theatre with flip-top seats made from Red Cross packing cases.

But, nonetheless, the majority saw it as their duty to try to escape. British POW Dick Churchill was the last surviving member of the escape team – he died in 2019 aged 99. He said to *The Telegraph*, "If nothing else, you are doing something towards the target of getting out and getting back to what you were doing before,

whether it's flying fighters or dropping bombs instead of giving in to despair." Military historian John D. Gresham has added, "Most of the Allied POWs were flyers, with all the technical, tactical and planning skills that profession requires. Such men are independent thinkers, craving open-air and wide-open spaces, which meant that an obsession with escape was almost inevitable."

Under Roger Bushell's capable organisation it was decided various options were necessary. In his own words, "three bloody deep, bloody long tunnels will be dug [codenamed] Tom, Dick and Harry. One will succeed!" The plan was that if one was discovered they always had a back-up option, something that proved invaluable when, in September 1943, the entrance to Tom was indeed exposed, Dick proved inoperable due to fresh building and Harry subsequently became the principal focus, its entrance ingeniously hidden under a stove plinth.

Bushell ensured each prisoner's individual strengths were utilised. Engineers devised the tunnel, creatives devised convincing uniforms or helped with forging documents. Those with linguistic skills would fraternise with guards and often bribe the most disillusioned – or naïve – with Red Cross goodies, like real coffee or chocolate; compromising behaviour that meant they then had to discreetly provide items urgently needed, or have collaboration exposed. An essential system of watchmen, like serial escaper, British B.A. "Jimmy" James, ensured no German "ferrets" (as they named the tunnel-checkers) could compromise activities. Materials were often stored within the very tunnels being dug.

By March 1944, Stalag Luft III held around 5,000 prisoners. German seismograph microphones had been placed underground to uncover digging so the tunnels were dug deep down to avoid detection. It was gruelling, nerve-wracking work, done with improvised tools against the risk of discovery or dangerous sand falls – of the latter there were many, but fortuitously, none fatal.

Bed-boards from the men's bunks were used to shore up the tunnel, ensuring safety, and Klim milk cans created a pipe allowing extensive ventilation. Initially they had only oil

Film still from The Great Escape

Historical re-enactment of the Prisoner of War camp Stalag Luft III

lamps to light their work, later on, after stealing wire from electricians on site, they managed to install electric lights throughout Harry (linked to the camp's energy supply) which boosted productivity and morale. To travel along the tunnel involved lying on one's stomach on a trolley and being pulled along by rope. There were two "half way" houses (wryly named Piccadilly and Leicester Square in deference to London tube stations) where trolley-changing was necessary to negotiate a further section.

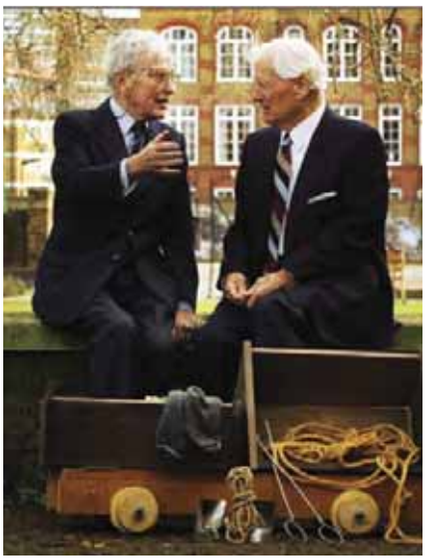
Disposing of sand required ingenuity as it was of a yellowish hue, quite distinctive from the greyer colour visible above ground. Dutchman Bram Vanderstok, one of the few men to achieve a "Home Run" that fateful day in 1944 (and the most decorated Dutch airman in history) described an encounter in his memoir. One day, POWs carrying empty Red Cross boxes were stopped by baffled German guards. Asked about their intentions Vanderstok recalls, "British Officer [Harry] Wings Day, one of the leading Escape Committee members, simply smiled and said, 'Nothing to worry about . . . Just English humour!' Some of the ferrets and other guards

Memorial marking the entrance to tunnel "Harry"

laughed at the joke of the empty boxes to show they appreciated English humour. It all helped to confuse the German mind!"

The next day they repeated the same thing and were firmly told that yes, it had been a joke but not to do it again. "We lingered a little until the Germans marched off. Then we opened our boxes now filled with sand from our tunnels and emptied them onto the sports field . . . We had got rid of the sand of ten days' digging!" This chance event aside, one of the best methods for getting rid of the huge quantities of sand was the use of >

Australian pilot Paul Brickhill



"Jimmy" James (left) and Sydney Dowse in 2004

Successful escapee Jens Müller and his wife

> "penguins", men who used trouser bags ingeniously fitted inside their greatcoats and who'd walk around the large compound, casually releasing sand as they went. Eventually necessity also meant sand was stored in bulk under the theatre.

Construction on Harry was almost complete by March 1944 and it was decided that the next moonless night should be designated for escape. "Jimmy" James recalled of this time, "I was gripped by a mounting tension and excitement pervading the compound", and compatriot Jens Müller, a Norwegian and fellow escapee also recalled, "The whole camp was in a state of intense but hidden activity . . . those working in the clothes or paper departments were in a flat spin because short of time."

The first 30 men due out had been chosen for their fluent German, the next for their overall credentials and escape efforts and the last drew tickets in a lottery to gain a place. The early escapees were dressed in authentic civilian clothing or uniforms. They also had the best maps and most convincing ID papers, produced by prisoners after they'd cleverly managed to get their hands on a camera. The rest of the men, nicknamed "hard-arsers" on account of the slog they'd endure, were given basic maps, acceptable travel and work permits, clothing, rations (like the camp-baked fudge, a highly calorific sweet concoction designed to stave off hunger) and homemade compasses. It was hoped that upwards of 200 might make it out after nightfall.

But fate intervened. By 10 pm on 24 March after lights-out, no-one was yet clear of the tunnel. After a protracted start when icy conditions temporarily froze the tunnel exit, things started to go wrong in swift succession and once the location's deficiency was realised a new system was quickly implemented: a rope was attached to the top rung of the ladder in the exit shaft, its end attached to a safe point in the trees where a man would give either a tug to signal safe exit or offer caution. This was obviously a much slower strategy than initially conceived, but with determination and great adaptability, by 4.55 am 76 men had got out until, suddenly, the tunnel exit was discovered by a strolling sentry and it was all over.

Such a mass exodus, what Brickhill has dubbed "the greatest prison-camp escape of them all", inevitably generated an enormous manhunt by the German authorities. Sadly, the majority of escapees were recaptured within days, their chances minimal in winter with such large numbers mobilised. But three men defied the odds and made it home: Jens Müller, Per Bergsland and Bram Vanderstok. Norwegians Jens and Per travelled together and had the good fortune to find kind Swedish sailors who helped them stow away aboard a ship bound for neutral Sweden. Vanderstok's solo passage back to Britain is worthy of a film in itself as he took four months to reach safety, encountering frequent danger and imminent discovery, but his intelligence, fluency in German and knowledge of the terrain proved enormously helpful until, finally, he walked the last two miles into Spain and to freedom.

The outcome for many of the remaining men was, sadly, radically different. Incensed by the mass breakout, and in flagrant breach of the Geneva Convention, Hitler ordered all recaptured prisoners to be shot. This number was later reduced to 50, the official story given that men had perished whilst trying to escape again but everyone knew it was an act of mass murder that sent shockwaves through the world.

"Jimmy" James and Wings Day spent time in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp before finally being liberated by the Allies in 1945 and Dick Churchill probably had his surname to thank for his reprieve but the camp's head of forgery, Briton Tim Walenn, and Roger Bushell himself were amongst those who perished. A memorial to the 50 carved at the camp by shocked inmates still stands today. Post-war, there was a dedicated British inquiry which investigated the actions of all Germans implicated in these appalling crimes.

In 1963 Dick Churchill attended the premiere of the film *The Great Escape*. Many of his colleagues found the film too glossy, but he allegedly told the producer, "It was great . . . but it was a long way from the truth!" Sanguinely, the producer replied, "That's the film world." It's ironic that Hollywood changed the script because, as with all heroic stories, the truth really was stranger than fiction in every conceivable way.

FURTHER READING

The Great Escape
Paul Brickhill (Faber & Faber)
Escape from Stalag Luft III
Bob Vanderstok (Greenhill Books)
Moonless Night
B.A. "Jimmy" James (Pen & Sword)

Images: Shutterstock, Alamy

POSTAL PROGRESS

Eleanor Doughty says farewell to the classic stamps we know and love

IN July this year, something pivotal is happening. The traditional postage stamp will be no more. It's being replaced by a brand-new stamp that still bears the late Queen's profile – for a short time, before it, too, is replaced by the new King's head – but also bears an addition: a barcode. As a serial letter writer, I get through an awful lot of stamps. And until last spring, when Royal Mail began to drip their new, larger purple (first class) and green (second class) stamps into post offices, I preferred them small, red and traditional.

But this is not the first time stamps have changed. Royal Mail produced over 100 different colours of stamp over the late Queen Elizabeth's reign, and the world's first adhesive stamp was black – the Penny Black. Introduced in May 1840, it bore the profile of a teenage Queen Victoria. In that image, she was facing left, and ever since, every monarch to appear on a British stamp has also faced left. Chris Taft, head of collections at the Postal Museum in London, has a theory about why this might have persisted. "Because of where one is encouraged to position a stamp, in the top right-hand corner, it would look slightly odd if someone was looking out of the edge of the envelope."

Since 1967, the image on British stamps has been a reproduction of a design by sculptor Arnold Machin, leading to stamps featuring the late Queen's head being known as Machins. I recently discovered a number of Machins in my family's stamp box. It contains a selection of different coloured stamps, including a faded, and now purely collectible, red 1d stamp bearing George VI's profile, most likely dating back to World War II, as well as a selection of slightly different blue second classes, a purple £3.00, a dark green 2p, a light green 20p, and a classic red 1st. Most of these appear to be regular stamp fare,

The new style stamps are on sale now

but Royal Mail have produced a number of stamps in celebratory colours – gold, for instance, in 1997, to celebrate the golden wedding anniversary of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

The concept of displaying "1st" or "2nd" on stamps came about in the late 1980s, explains Scott Kibby, a specialist collector and consultant of Queen Elizabeth II stamps.

"Before that, all stamps displayed whatever the current price was. Because the first and second are most heavily used, it was decided to print them without a fixed value." Until July this year, you can use stamps dating back to the start of decimalisation in 1971, as long as the price is right. When I speak to Kibby, he has "two half pence stamps from the early 70s that are still worth half a pence. I could stick them on an envelope and that would cover a penny of my postage."

Arguably, Chris Taft says, the Machin image is "the most reproduced artwork in history", and is equally remarkable for its longevity. "The image of the stamp is the same today as Queen Victoria's stamp was, with a profile image of the monarch on a coloured background. The basic concept hasn't changed." He adds that, since Britain was the first country to produce such a stamp, it is also "the only country in the world not required to put its name on the stamp. The image of the monarch on the stamp alone is enough to indicate it's a British stamp."

The barcoded stamps reflect a need to protect Royal Mail's revenue. "If you go on to eBay you can buy stacks of fake first-class stamps for huge discounts," says Scott Kibby. "The idea behind the barcode is that every single stamp is unique, so if Royal Mail's machines are working correctly then they can tell if that barcode has been through the system." It makes a lot of sense, and reminds one that a stamp, as Kibby says, "is a tool to do a job. It's not designed to look pretty. To some people it is pretty, and an interesting topic of study, but to most people it's just a stamp."

The new stamps allow for a range of modern features, with their scannable barcodes allowing us to track the progress of letters and parcels, and providing access to exclusive quirky videos made by Royal Mail featuring characters such as Shaun the Sheep. I admit to being a bit of a purist – after all, the dinky, barcode-free stamp is something of an icon, and there is something quietly endearing about it. But its time is over.

You have until 31 July to use up your old stamps. After this date, you can swap these old stamps for new barcoded stamps by filling out a "Stamp Swap Out" form on the Royal Mail website. *royalmail.com*

The Penny Black

Use up your old stamps by July this year

Images: Royal Mail, Shutterstock

FORGET-ME-NOTS

Roy Hampson visits an old barber shop and recalls his own trips to the barber's chair as a boy

GROWING up during the 1950s, the dreaded Saturday mornings would arrive when mother popped a half a crown coin in my hand then pointed me in the direction of the local gents' barber. My plans for playing in the street with my mates or going to the kids' matinee at the local pictures regretfully had to be postponed for the day. What a waste of time, I would think to myself, hanging around, waiting my turn to be seated in the barber's chair, all for a short back and sides. This was sheer agony to an impatient young lad like myself who could think of more pleasurable ways to spend my Saturday mornings.

The hairdresser at the top of our street was Arthur. "A. Swift, Hairdresser" was clearly etched on his shop window glass. Swift by name, but certainly not swift by nature, as he had a reputation for being the slowest barber in town. He simply lacked any urgency whatsoever and plodded along with such astonishing slowness. He also ran a filling station at the front of his premises – only a couple of pumps, but they kept him busy, frequently interrupting his laid-back approach to clipping hair, leading to even longer intervals in the chair.

Hairdressing products from the past

Roy in the chair of Mr Grice

Vehicles would regularly pull on to the forecourt requiring a fill up, and (all of the following in slow motion) he would glance out of his window, put down the comb and scissors, swap his white barber's coat to a brown smock, then proceed outdoors to fill up the awaiting car – with my hair only half cut!

The agony would be prolonged by looking over my shoulder and noticing Arthur casually chatting away to the driver, then, as part of the forecourt service, giving the car windscreen a wipe over with his chamois leather. This was all very well if it was a tiny Austin Seven or Ford Popular, perhaps, but horror of horrors, if a massive fuel-guzzling coal merchant's lorry turned up. The fuel pump, as if in co-ordination with Mr Swift's dead slow pace, chugged away bit by bit, delivering diesel into its tank!

Other interruptions to the business of hair cutting would follow when his wife would call through from the back: "Arthur, your dinner's ready." So off he would vanish for up to 30 minutes, leaving me stranded, my hair only half cut and cotton wool stuffed down my neck.

Arthur would enquire what sort of haircut had I in mind. It always had to be a "short back and sides with a bit off the top". To be truthful, in those days, I was so embarrassed that I didn't know of any other haircuts.

The kids at school would joke about a "basin cut". Children from impoverished families would have a suitable kitchen basin plonked on their heads and Mum would simply cut the remaining hair left sticking out at the sides. I'd heard of a "crew cut", but I had better not mention that as my parents were pretty elderly and hardly trendsetters. I was brought up a kind of old-fashioned way and Dad might be upset if I returned home sporting a trendy new haircut looking like Tommy Steele or Elvis!

Come to think of it, Dad wasn't too fond of the hairdresser using Brylcreem to keep hair in place, either. He was a comb and tap water man – possibly a habit picked up from time spent in the army.

Surprisingly, I eventually began to enjoy my occasional visits to the barber. It was certainly both interesting and entertaining listening to the tales the old men told as they sat waiting: amusing tales about folk in our town, with the odd bit of gossip thown in for good measure. As I grew older I could join in with interesting conversations or heated debates.

During one particular visit to an out-of-town barber's shop, I purposely kept on missing my turn in order to listen to the interesting banter going on between the waiting clients, as each customer on that day told an amusing story.

There was a tale from a local farmer, practical joker and part-time inventor who decided to scare off a persistent poacher by rigging up a ghostly hare in his field connected to a car battery, which glowed white in the dark and had green glaring eyes when approached.

The barber that day had his own tale to tell, confessing that during the war he was forced to sign the Official Secrets Act so that the public wouldn't discover that hair clippings swept up from the floor each day were added to freshly baked bread. Human hair was ground into fine powder, then added to the bread dough. The barber revealed that hair, rich in protein, was just what the public in war-torn Britain needed to maintain good health and strength.

These days no one refers to a barber's shop. It's a hairdresser's salon, parlour or beautician, and in many cases the personal service has gone, along with the cut-throat razors, jars of Brylcreem and leather straps for sharpening the blades.

In Wakefield, West Yorkshire, I discovered a gents' hairdresser run by Mr David Grice. Now long-since retired after 50 years of service, stepping inside the door of Mr David's parlour was like taking a journey back in time, the sights and smells evoking my own schoolboy memories. Customers were treated with old-fashioned courtesy and given the chance to enjoy the expertise of a proper old-fashioned barber, David told me.

A bit of sound advice!

Hair tonics collected by David Grice

Clients could also marvel at his large collection of hairdressing memorabilia, which he had accumulated over the 50 years.

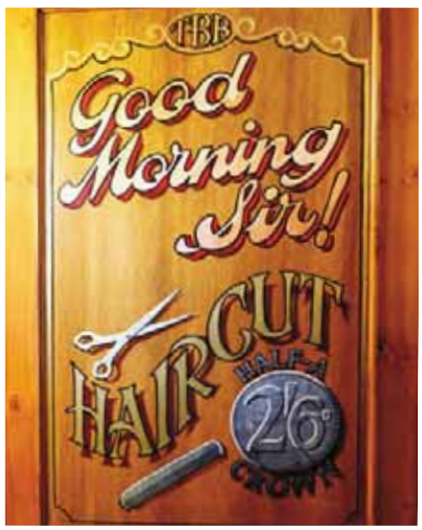
"They always admired my cut-glass perfume cologne bottles, which were once essential tools of the trade," said David. "Victorian chemists would mix up huge hair care recipes such as hair oils and dyes for eyebrows and whiskers. It was believed in those days that because bears have thick hair, if the grease was applied to bald patches, hair would grow back."

Miniature containers that once held Brilliantine, a popular hair-grooming product from Edwardian times, were all part of David's collection along with moustache mugs.

"In Victorian times most men had impressive moustaches, which would be waxed or dyed to keep them looking fabulous. Gentlemen drank hot tea, which would melt the wax or dye, which would run embarrassingly into the beverage. So a cup was created incorporating a ledge to hold the moustache. This allowed gentlemen to sip tea and, at the same time, keep their upper lip dry."

Customers could not only sample David's personal attention, but also enjoy his interesting conversation and tales about a few past illustrious visitors to his salon. Among them, the day he trimmed the hair of serial killer Harold Shipman.

"On one memorable rainy afternoon, a quiet day, I was busy doing a bit of cleaning when a very polite, pleasant man walked into my shop. He mentioned that he was a doctor at Pontefract Hospital. Later on



A greeting in Mr Grice's barber shop

his picture appeared in the newspaper and I thought that I recognised this chap. The penny dropped – I had previously been standing only 18 inches from serial killer Harold Shipman. He was so courteous to me that day that I can see how he deceived everyone."

While working his apprenticeship as a trainee hairdresser, David recalled his first ever duty was to carry a jar over to the local courthouse to powder the judges' wigs. He also recalled how once Sir Douglas Bader, the World War II ace pilot, gave him two-shilling pieces as a reward for running an errand.

Another regular of David's was Mr Albert Pierrepoint, Britain's longest-serving hangman.

On a final visit before he retired, David told me that he had wanted to be tall, but knowing that would never happen thought he would have to be a good hairdresser instead.

Images: Roy Hampson

ROARING *Ladies* AND WICKED GIRLS

Lin Bensley looks back on the highwaywomen who once terrorised travellers on our roads

HIGHWAYMEN are well documented figures, from Alfred Noyes' famous poem *The Highwayman* to the legend of Dick Turpin. However, less well documented are the many women who operated as highway robbers in days gone by, far removed from the subservient roles women were expected to follow without question.

One such woman, who roamed the streets in the early 1600s, was Moll Cutpurse. Real name Mary Frith, she was born in 1584, the daughter of a London shoemaker. Her parents gave her the best education they could afford, but Mary repaid their kindness by mixing with the wrong sort. Tomboyish by nature, she began wearing male attire and aping the surly mannerisms of her low-life companions, which earned her the nickname of "The Roaring Girl". She further compounded her reputation by smoking a pipe, claiming to be the first female to adopt the habit. By the time she was 15, Mary was a skilled thief, working with a gang in the bear garden in Southwark. Charged with theft and accordingly burnt on the hands for each offence, she earned the moniker of "Moll Cutpurse" in the process.

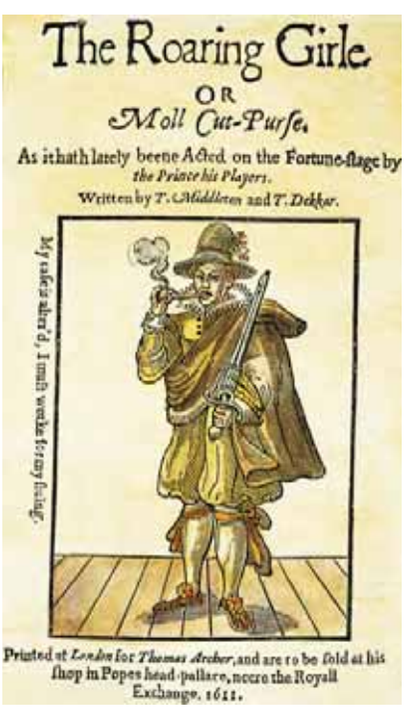
Soon, Moll became a highway robber. Already a proficient horsewoman who could handle firearms, she was no less capable of wielding a sword, and found the rewards for her efforts much to her liking. She enjoyed a long and profitable reign until the night she robbed one Lord Halifax on Hounslow Heath. After shooting Halifax in the arm, she made her escape, but was caught at Turnham Green when her horse went lame. From the proceeds of her crimes, Moll bought a pardon for £2,000 and thereafter gave up her night-time activities to become a fence, buying and selling stolen goods. Her infamous career was played out for audiences in a Jacobean stage production, *The Roaring Girl*, throughout the 1600s.

Joan Phillips arrived on the scene shortly afterwards. Being most comely, and the daughter of a wealthy Northamptonshire farmer, she attracted many admirers. Among these was Edward Bracey, who approached her father for her hand only to be rebuffed. The pair fled to Yorkshire, where they fell in with a gang led by Bracey's cousin, John Nevison. Already established as a highwayman and murderer, Nevison, or "Swift Nicks" as he was known, welcomed the pair into his gang, unaware that Bracey's partner, "John" was Joan.

The couple had soon earned enough to purchase an inn in the suburbs of Bristol, where Joan's good looks attracted many guests who were easily parted from their money. However, the inn soon became a hotspot for criminality, and the couple were forced to abandon it.

Returning to thieving, the pair met their match while working the Loughborough Road. On holding up a rather grand-looking coach, Joan made the mistake of pausing to examine their spoils when the occupant leapt from the coach and struck her a severe blow. In the scuffle that followed, Bracey made his escape, but Joan did not. The revelation that "John Phillips" was a fine-looking woman drew the attention of the public, but did nothing to diminish her crimes in the eyes of the judge who sentenced her to be hanged on 1 April, 1685, aged just 29. Her body was placed in a gibbet on Loughborough Road and left there as a warning to other highway robbers.

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and Margaret Matthews is testament to this. The daughter of a sword-maker, she is thought to have


The Roaring Girle
OR
Moll Cut-Purse.
As it hath lately beene Acted on the Fortune-stage by the Prince his Players.
Written by T. Middleton and T. Dekker.
Printed at London for Thomas Archer, and are to be sold at his shop in Popes head-pallace, neere the Royall Exchange. 1611.

Mary Frith captured the public imagination

been born in Lavenham, Suffolk, about 1660. At 15 she married an innkeeper who turned out to be abusive, and in an effort to escape her predicament she sought financial independence by taking to highway robbery. As she explained to her biographer, Captain Johnson, "I judged this resolution safe enough, if I were not detected in the very act; for who could suspect me to be a robber, wearing a broad man's apparel, but at home a dress more suitable to my sex?" Margaret often adopted her disguise and went in search of easy pickings. She even had the temerity to ambush and rob her husband of a considerable sum of money, which he handed over with such meekness that Margaret realised his violent temper merely hid a cowardly nature.

Margaret soon made enough to procure an establishment of her own. All went well until one night in 1685 when she intercepted a male rider making his way to London via a lonely back road, not realising that the man before her was the notorious highwayman Thomas Rumbold. Having robbed the Earl of Oxford and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rumbold had a price on his head, but was momentarily taken aback to find himself the victim of a hold-up rather than the perpetrator.

While pretending to search his pockets for money, Rumbold withdrew his pistol and shot at his antagonist who instantly returned fire, but both missed, instead wounding their horses who threw the pair to the ground. As Captain Johnson recounted, "After hard fighting on both sides, Rumbold finally threw his adversary, bound him hand and foot and proceeded to his more immediate object of rifling. Upon opening his coat he was amazed to discover he had been fighting a woman."

Upon detecting his error Rumbold offered his apologies and released Margaret. Indebted to Rumbold for his gallantry, Margaret invited him to spend the night with her at her home. Rumbold gratefully complied, but – there being less honour among thieves than the adage would have us believe – he arose early the next morning and made off with a quantity of gold. Further records concerning Margaret's life are inconsistent, but evidence of her death from dropsy was recorded at Norwich in 1689.

Of all the women who took to highway robbery, none proved to be more bewitching nor more ruthless than Katherine Ferrers, best known as "The Wicked Lady". Her story inspired the 1945 film of the same name, with its titular character portrayed by Margaret Lockwood and, in the 1980s remake, Faye Dunaway.

Born in 1634, the daughter of a prosperous Hertfordshire land-owner, Katherine was forced into an arranged marriage with Thomas Fanshawe at the age of just 13, during the height of the English Civil War. Being steadfast Royalists, the Fanshawes had been relieved by the parliamentarians of much of their wealth, and Thomas did the same for his bride and her family

Margaret Lockwood starred in 1945 film The Wicked Lady

A satirical drawing from 1791

before disappearing. Left penniless and alone in a rambling country house, Katherine turned to crime to recoup her losses.

She would leave the house under darkness via a secret passageway and make for Gustard Wood, to the north of Wheathampstead, where she apparently maintained a hideout. Some say she teamed up with local farmer Ralph Chaplin. One of Katherine's favoured methods was to hide in a tree overhanging the road and drop down in front of her quarry with pistols drawn. However, Katherine soon found herself without her partner. Some reports state that Chaplin was shot dead during an attempted robbery, while others say he was apprehended and hanged on Finchley Common.

How exactly Katherine met her end is also debatable. The most popular rumour recounts that she held up a wagon on Nomansland Common, and upon shooting the driver dead failed to notice an armed passenger who discharged his pistol and seriously wounded her. The story goes that Katherine almost made it home before she collapsed and died, her body later recovered by her loyal servants who carried her back for burial.

Thriving on the assumption that no one would suspect the fairer sex of such heinous crimes, these women are some of the most cunning thieves to have roamed our highways; and their stories are some of the most remarkable forgotten by history.

Images: Shutterstock, Mary Evans Picture Library/Reform Club

HIDDEN GARDENS OF ENGLAND

Catherine Larner speaks to garden writer Barbara Segall about her new book on the secret gardens of Kent, Sussex and Surrey

A magical avenue of silver birch trees at Doddington Place Gardens in Sittingbourne, Kent

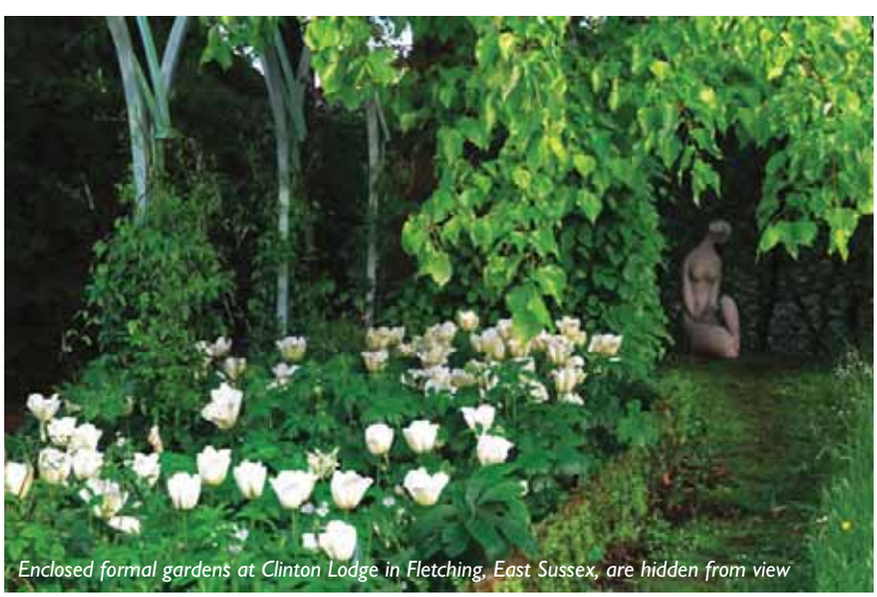
UNLOCKING a gate, pushing open a door, stepping through a tall hedge or peering round a brick wall to find a hidden garden never fails to delight. Conjuring up all the magic and expectation of children's stories, there's a frisson of excitement that we might discover our own Narnia, Wonderland or Secret Garden.

It's not a surprise then, that a series of books revealing "secret gardens" all around the country is doing very well. The latest title explores "the garden of England" in the counties of Kent, Sussex and Surrey in the south-east. Twenty properties have been selected by award-winning writer Barbara Segall and photographer Clive Boursnell, ranging from castles and historic homes to town-centre terraced houses and country cottages. Familiar names and formidable pedigrees mix with enthusiastic amateurs as the garden owners introduce us to their passions for topiary and sculpture gardens, roses and rhododendrons, grasses and primroses.

"Some of these gardens will seem familiar," says Barbara. "How, you might say, is Arundel Castle a secret garden? But I have realised that you can never truly know a garden until you have visited it yourself."

She recalls how she experienced this herself on a visit to the High Line in New York, a park created on a disused rail track in Manhattan. "I had read up about it. I knew everything about that place, but I wasn't prepared for the experience of seeing the city from that angle, or the audacity of growing plants on an old train track. Until you actually go through the gate, a garden is new and secret."

Many of the gardens of the south-east of England were unexplored



Enclosed formal gardens at Clinton Lodge in Fletching, East Sussex, are hidden from view

Garden writer Barbara Segall

Marcus Harpur

territory for Barbara, however. She lives in Suffolk and has spent her life writing about gardens and gardening. She was looking forward to touring the three counties to research this new book, but just as she began the project, the pandemic hit and travel wasn't possible.

"I had to do lots of looking online and asked gardening friends and colleagues for suggestions of gardens we needed to include," she says. "But it was a difficult time, as many owners didn't know what the future had in store. They didn't know whether they would ever open their gardens again."

Barbara and Clive were eventually able to visit, and the book is a triumph of beautiful pictures of plants and landscapes, and compelling histories and interviews.

Barbara has always enjoyed sharing people's stories. Growing up in South Africa, she trained as a journalist, working for a local paper after studying English at university. Her mother and grandmother had both instilled in her a love of gardening, and when she moved to the UK she started to use this knowledge in editing partworks for Marshall Cavendish, and then writing for a number of the gardening magazines that were launching at that time.

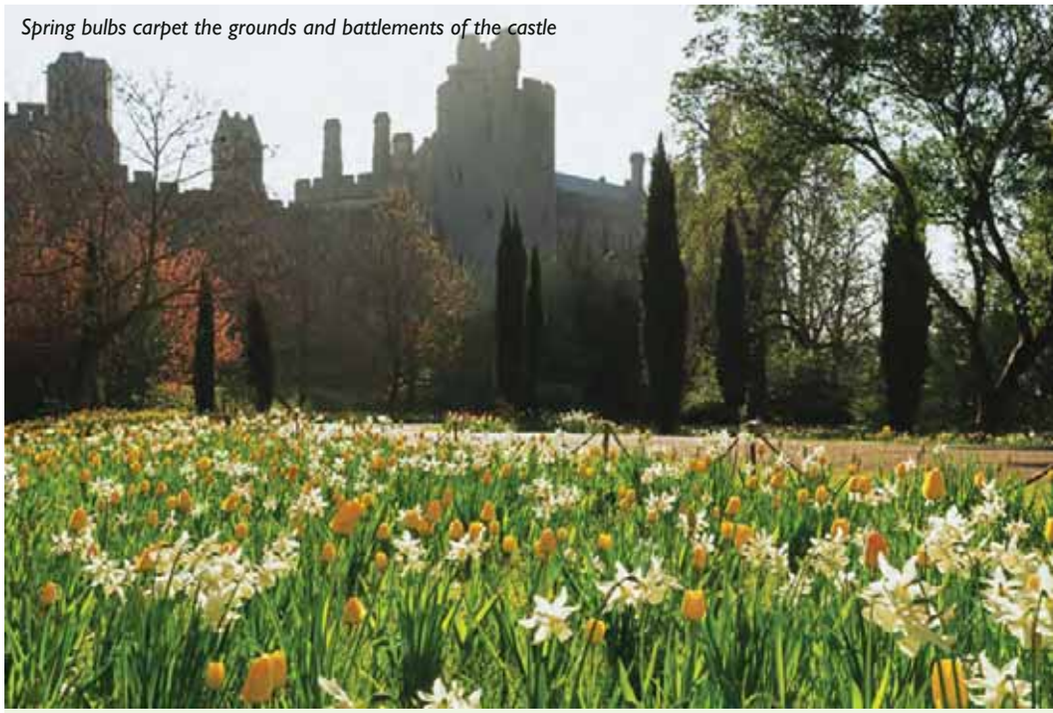
She also found the subject for her first book in these early years.

"I moved to Suffolk in 1986, to Holly Cottage near Long Melford," she says. "This was where I started my first real garden, and because of the name of the cottage and the plants in the garden, it became the inspiration for my first book *The Holly and the Ivy*."

It won prizes and 12 more books have followed, including titles presenting advice on herbs and edibles, which are her passions.

"I used to grow a crop of basil in the greenhouse for making pesto. And then as soon as I could, I would plant them outside, and I used to grow about 15 or 20 varieties."

Visitors to her current home, in the market town of Sudbury, always leave with a cutting from the garden, just as Barbara is often treated when she leaves the properties she investigates for her writing. But the greatest gift garden owners can give to any visitor is a glimpse of the magic they have created in their own corner of England.



Spring bulbs carpet the grounds and battlements of the castle

ARUNDEL CASTLE GARDENS, WEST SUSSEX

At Arundel, the walled gardens have long been overlooked by visitors, distracted by the drama of the turrets of the castle and the vaulted arches of the Victorian cathedral. "The head gardener told me that people would visit saying, 'I always come to the castle, but I never knew there was a garden'," says Barbara. "It is still secret to some people."

There are parts of the castle that are gardened and can be enjoyed as you walk past – a carpet of spring flowers on the battlements and the rose garden designed by the Duchess of Norfolk. But entering through a door in the wall, there are also courtyards, terraces, temples and fountains to explore.

The garden has been developed over the past 20 years, and today visitors are delighted by set pieces like the tulip maze, an allium festival and a water feature where a jet of water lifts a golden crown.

"They are making the garden a key part of the visitor experience," Barbara says of the castle gardens.

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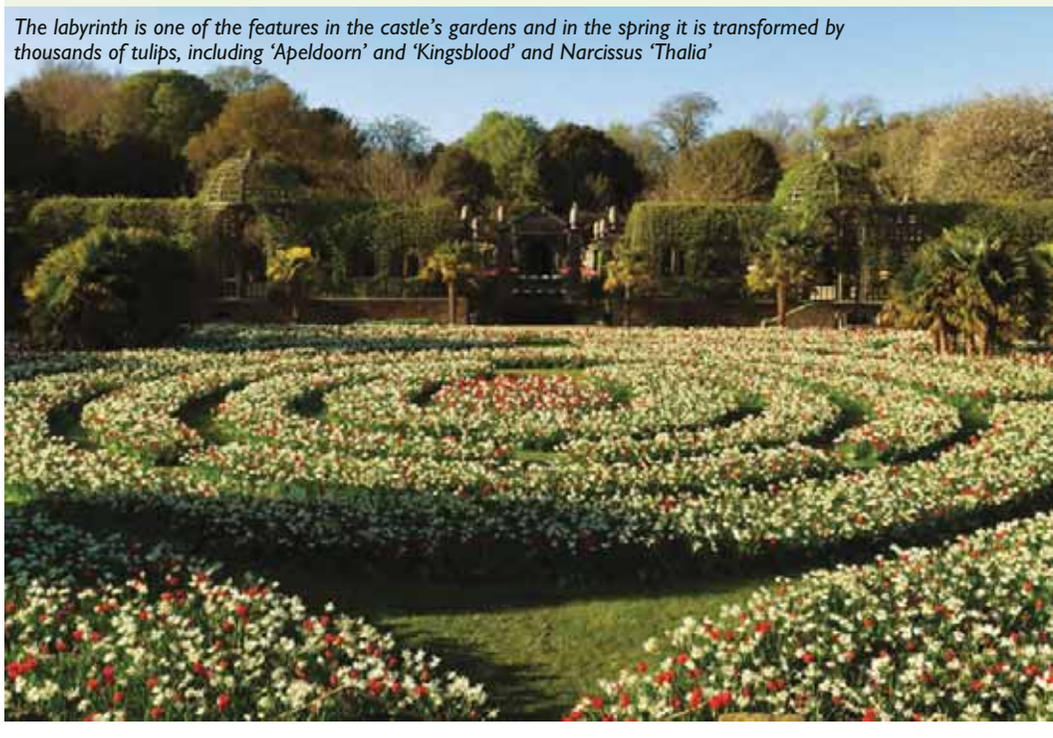
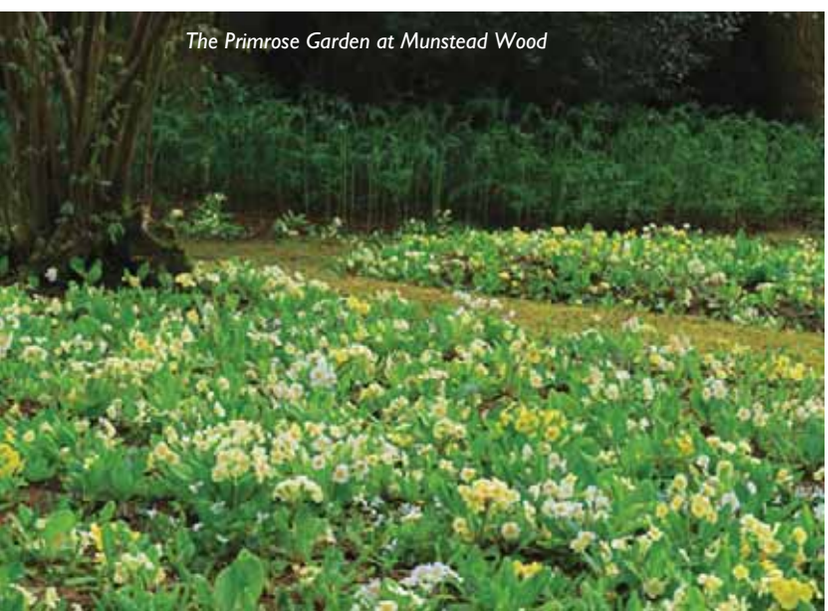


The labyrinth is one of the features in the castle's gardens and in the spring it is transformed by thousands of tulips, including 'Apeldoorn' and 'Kingsblood' and Narcissus 'Thalia'

A sculpture grafted on to a tree in the Quadrangle

> MUNSTEAD WOOD AND THE QUADRANGLE, GODALMING, SURREY

Spring is a spectacular time to visit Munstead Wood in Surrey. The former home of the great garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, it boasts a "river of daffodils" in the woodland garden, and a dedicated Primrose Garden where Jekyll developed and grew the "Munstead Bunch" variety.
Jekyll began her garden here in the early 1880s, and in 1895 work started on the Arts and Crafts house, designed by architect Edwin Lutyens. Their collaboration resulted in Jekyll being able to perfect her planting theories and grow flowers for clients. She had a dark room for photography, and a shop for flower arranging, which also sold bunches of cut flowers.
There have been difficult times since Jekyll's death. Jekyll's nephew divided the property into four or five lots and kept one for himself and sold the others.
"So it was already a disturbed property," says Barbara. "And then subsequent owners wanted a paddock and a swimming pool. During the storms of 1987 there were a lot of trees lost, but the gardener at the time said that the owners should restore it along the lines of Jekyll. Now they have a wonderful gardener called Annabel Watts, who is like a curator and runs tours."
Next door to Munstead Wood, Gail Naughton owns one of the relinquished plots, called the Quadrangle. She has used writings and photographs of the time Jekyll lived here to create a garden in her style.
Munstead Wood is currently on the market.
"Hopefully somebody will buy it who loves it and will look after the garden," says Barbara.



The Primrose Garden at Munstead Wood

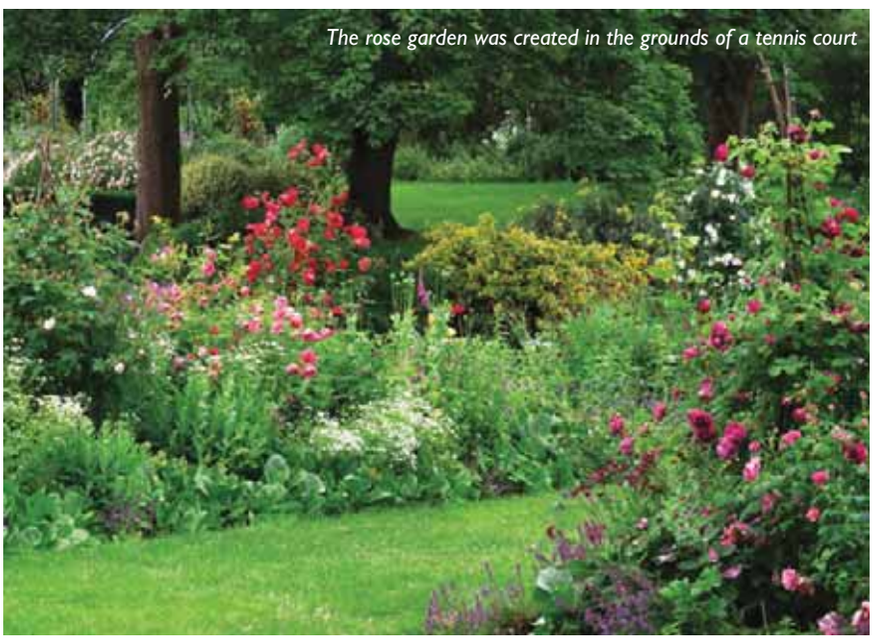
TOWN PLACE, NEAR SHEFFIELD PARK, EAST SUSSEX

When Anthony and Maggie McGrath bought the 400-year-old Grade II listed timber frame house in 1990, they added walls and fences to keep out deer and rabbits. Then they planted hedges of yew, copper beech and hornbeam to add structure and give plants shelter. Throughout the 3.5-acre plot, they created borders and enclosures, all with different identities.
Their vision in these early years is astonishing, with marvellous topiary, walks and borders, and also a tapestry hedge made by combining two conifer species. But the most stunning feature for Barbara is an area known as the New Territories – breath-taking architectural plantings inspired by a visit to the Dordogne. Anthony sketched out a ruined church and recreated it from hornbeam whips.
"He wanted to grow a chapel," says Barbara, "so he did. It's a ruined priory and his daughter got married in it. Clive photographed it on the wedding day because he knew the garden would be at its absolute peak. The family and guests were very good about this strange man wandering around with a black cloth over his head.
"I absolutely love it," Barbara says. "Because, it's at the end of your garden walk. You've seen amazing herbaceous areas, roses and all sorts of English garden features. Then you reach this. I found it astonishing."

The English Rose Garden

The buttressed hedges of the ruined priory, Toune Priory, are more than four metres high

The lime green Euphorbia provides a striking contrast to the hedges in front of the house at Long Barn



The rose garden was created in the grounds of a tennis court

The yews at Long Barn provide interest all year round

LONG BARN, SEVENOAKS, KENT

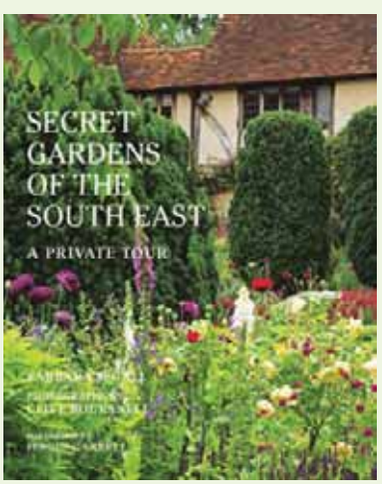
"Every owner brings something new and interesting to a garden," explains Barbara. "Rebecca Lemonius at Long Barn is one of those garden owners."

It was initially a daunting task, though. Long Barn was the first garden of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson of Sissinghurst fame, and the architect Edwin Lutyens had a hand in the garden design and planting. Long Barn was also home to the aviator Charles Lindbergh, the printing pioneer William Caxton was believed to have been born here, and a number of celebrities have owned it over the years.

"At one time Rebecca felt, what can I do here?" says Barbara. "Then she remembered that Vita experimented, so she could, too. Rebecca keeps the garden in the spirit of its creators, but with the plants that are available now."

There are stately yews, parterres, enclosed garden rooms, terraces, lawns and glorious colours and splendid foliage throughout. Visitors acknowledge a special atmosphere in the gardens, as if they're walking back in time, stepping into another world.

"Rebecca loves the history of the place," says Barbara, "but she brings a fresh modern approach and I think this is what each successive garden owner brings."



Secret Gardens of the South East *is published by Frances Lincoln, priced £22*

Images: Clive Boursnell unless stated otherwise

GREENSTED CHURCH, ESSEX

Chris Franks explores this Anglo-Saxon church, the oldest wooden building in Europe and the world's oldest wooden church

YOU can't get over how different it looks. For a start, it's so colourful. Most old churches are just shades of grey, but at Greensted Church in Essex there are black walls, red brick buttresses, terracotta roof tiles, a white and grey tower – it's such an incongruous mix, you can hardly believe it's one building. Dormer windows aren't normally associated with churches, either, but Greensted has six, and with its porch and gabled roof it looks more like a private residence. But for the basic L shape, you wouldn't think it was a church at all.

Excavations under the chancel in 1960 revealed that there has been a church at Greensted since the late 6th or early 7th century. Of what currently stands, the oldest parts were built sometime around 1060, though previous estimates had this as early as 845. The remarkable thing about Greensted is that those parts are wood – clearly visible today as the striking nave walls. Made from oak tree trunks split in half, the round sides face outwards and have turned dark as charcoal over the centuries, giving the nave a smoky corrugated appearance. It makes Greensted unique in several ways: as the only wooden Anglo-Saxon church still standing, the oldest wooden building in Europe, and the oldest wooden church in the world.

With such a deep history, it's not surprising that Greensted has illustrious associations. St Edmund, England's first patron saint, passed through here. Edmund was king of East Anglia, and in 869, while defending his lands against Viking attacks, he was defeated in battle and taken prisoner. His captors demanded that he renounce his Christian faith, and when he refused, he was scourged, tied to a tree, shot through with arrows and beheaded. Legend has it that his head was thrown into a forest and his followers found it guarded by a wolf that wouldn't leave until body and head were reunited.

The south porch was added in the early 16th century

Sometime during the reign of King Æthelstan (circa 924-939), Edmund's remains were interred in what is now Bury St Edmunds, but were moved to London in 1010 for safekeeping. On their return to Bury in 1013, the remains were rested overnight at Greensted. Following William the Conqueror's invasion in 1066, the Normans stamped their authority on an unruly nation by replacing many wooden fortresses in stone, resulting in England's first castles. They also rebuilt churches, and while this left a rich legacy, it erased every Saxon wooden church in the country, except Greensted.

Inside, the place seems to be celebrating its survival with the ligneous theme extended to the entire nave. The windows, the ceiling, the roof beams and pews – everything but the floor is wood. It's very effective, but also quite dark, and anything bright or colourful stands out. A plaque on the south wall lists almost every rector since 1328. On the north wall is a reproduction of a 16th-century painting, depicting the martyrdom of St Edmund. Further along is a triangular aperture a few inches wide, often mistaken for a leper squint, though it's actually the remains of a window. By normal standards, the stained glass is modest, but here the

Greensted Church, built by the Anglo-Saxons

colours are hypnotic, reflecting off the wood with a thin, ghostly shimmer. The chancel, with its whitewashed stone and arched window, feels more familiar, but it is to the nave that you are constantly drawn. You can't resist shuffling along a pew to get up close to those ancient walls.

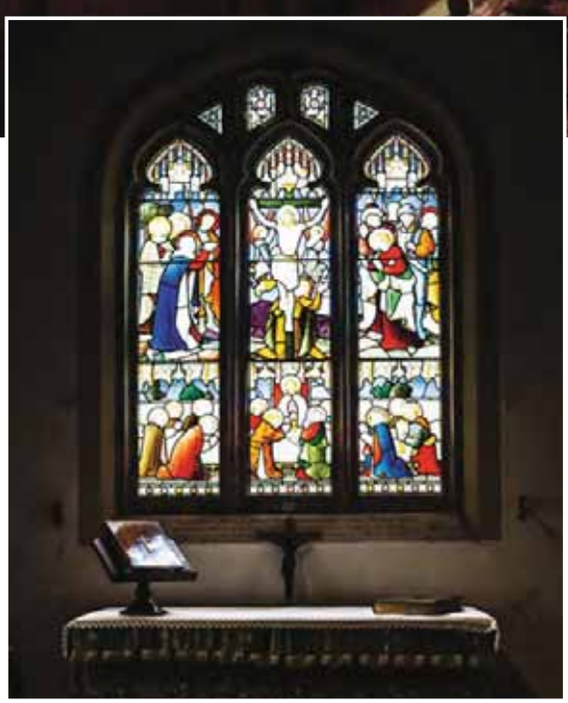
So what are they like? Protected from the elements on the inside, they aren't charcoal black, but a deep chestnut brown. There's no flutey hollow ring when you tap them: they're as solid as granite. You wonder if they have a smell, maybe something like an antiques shop, but when you put your face close there is nothing. The surfaces are pitted with chips and dents, and as your fingers explore, you can almost hear the nine-centuries-dead carpenters toiling away: their laboured gasps, the metallic pings of their adzes. These walls have stood since 1060, yet the trees had probably been growing for over a century before they were felled. How often do you get to touch wood over a thousand years old?

Around the beginning of the 16th century, there were substantial alterations to Greensted. The chancel, the only part the Normans did change, was rebuilt in red brick. The original thatched roof was replaced with tiles, the south porch was constructed, and three dormer windows were added, filling the church with natural light for the first time. The white and grey tower came later, sometime in the early 17th century. Its eye-catching, splay-foot spire is a characteristic of this part of England.

In contrast to many churches, Greensted's restoration under the Victorians was its salvation. The wooden walls, which had stood on bare mud for centuries, had rotted at their base. They were shortened and mounted on brick back to their original height, thus protecting them from further decay. Three more dormer windows were added, bringing the total to six, and the simple roof beams were replaced with more elaborate collars and braces. Other than steel reinforcements to the roof in 1990, this is the structure that stands today.

That Greensted survived, while every other wooden church perished, seems almost miraculous. It's tempting to think that it was some kind of divine influence, though a more mundane and probably more likely explanation is that, at the time, Greensted was new. If the >

Greensted's nave, made entirely of wood, is unique and gives the church a warm, comforting feeling



The colourful stained-glass window

> construction date of 1060 is correct, it was built just six years before the Norman invasion, making it one of England's very last wooden Saxon churches. Maybe when the Normans came, they saw how recent it was and decided it was good enough to leave? From the scant remains of their work – a stone wash basin and a few flint fragments – the Normans did very little. Had Greensted been just a few years older, it would probably have been erased. Had it been built after 1066, it would have been in stone anyway. Maybe there was just a brief time during which a wooden church could have survived the Normans, and Greensted was just lucky?

Because it survived, though, it gives us a unique insight, not just into what wooden churches looked like, but what they felt like, too. Sitting in some vast medieval cathedral, amid all that austere stone, you feel humbled by the immensity of God. But at Greensted, there's something warm and personal, putting its arms around you. Here, God isn't intimidating, but someone who befriends and comforts. You feel safe and at peace and it all seems to emanate from those venerable timbers.

The visitors' book demonstrates how powerful this effect is. People come to Greensted from all over the world – Australia, Poland, the USA, the Philippines – and their comments are not of awe, but of affection. Words like "beautiful", "lovely", "peaceful" and "wonderful" are littered throughout the pages. Sitting in the nave of Greensted, you wish that more churches felt like this.

But then, we have changed so much over the centuries in our ideas about churches, about religion, about so many things. Gone are those Saxon wooden huts, now replaced by our gigantic conurbations of concrete, glass and steel. Gone is that simple mortal faith: now we have our new gods of technology, social media and financial prosperity.

You leave Greensted enchanted, but sad, too, that it's the only one of its kind left. Fine though England's stone churches are, you cannot help but wonder, when the Normans swept everything away, if something wasn't lost. You realise that Greensted isn't so different. It is a last surviving remnant in a very different world.

greenstedchurch.org.uk

Images: Alamy, Shutterstock

TREES OF ENGLAND

Jan Johnstone on the sturdy hornbeam – Carpinus betulus

Close-up of the fruit and leaves of the hornbeam

Hornbeam in a forest

THE hornbeam can easily be recognised by its pale grey trunk, the bark patterned with vertical silvery-green "stripes". The trunk supports a wide canopy of leaves and is often used as a hedging plant forming a dense screen. Favouring clay soils, it can be found in old, well-established woodland such as the Hainault and Epping Forests near London and the Avon Wildlife Trust's Prior's Wood.

A height of 98 feet (30 metres) can be reached by mature trees and some have been known to live for over 300 years. Similar to the beech, hornbeam leaves – tooth-edged and a tender green, sometimes tinged with red appear from April to May along with large male and female catkins. The former come out first bearing red anthers which in April split open and release pollen which is spread to the female catkins by the wind.

The green bracts of the hornbeam hang down in bunches known as samaras and when ripe release 30 to 40 tiny nuts which fall to the ground dispersing in a wide arc. This is due to the shape of the seed's "wing" which makes it spin. By then, leaves and bracts have turned to a rich orangey gold.

Birds use the hornbeam's branches for roosting and nesting and during winter the remaining leaves on the tree provide welcome shelter for both birds and small mammals. The seeds are a favourite food of tits and finches, particularly the UK's largest, the hawfinch. Voles and mice will forage for the tiny seeds in autumn and it is also a food plant for a variety of moths. Due to the hornbeam's relatively low height, other trees in the vicinity protect it and this too is an advantage for wildlife.

Hornbeams are commonly found in oak woodlands, and in days gone by, were managed by coppicing (cutting off at ground level) or pollarding (cutting at head height) to provide poles, firewood and charcoal, the latter used to smelt iron. If you see a pollarded "stool" when out and about it is a sign that at one time there were fuelwood rights practised locally providing firewood or charcoal for the local community.

The heavy creamy-white wood is very hard and difficult to work, earning the tree its alternative name "hardbeam". The Romans are known to have built their chariots from it and in the medieval era it was used to make yokes for pairs of ploughing oxen. In later centuries, the timber was used to make butcher's chopping blocks, piano hammers, windmill cogs, coach and cart wheels, and chess pieces.

Today, it is popular for building furniture or for flooring and is much favoured by woodworkers, although it is so hard it can easily blunt a saw so is generally used in wood-turning projects. It is also useful for firewood and charcoal.

In mythology, the hornbeam was associated with longevity, good luck, healing and wisdom and it earned a reputation for being protective as well as instilling confidence. Ancient peoples also believed that the hornbeam was a ladder between worlds as well as representing a spirit worshipped in their religion.

In days gone by, a tonic made from hornbeam leaves was used to relieve exhaustion and tiredness whilst the bark was boiled down and its properties used to stop wounds bleeding or to treat sore muscles. In complementary medicine today extracts are believed to relieve tired eyes and low morale.

Throughout the winter, the hornbeam retains its leaves. If there is a strong breeze blowing, listen and you will hear the soughing of the wind as the tree awaits spring and new growth.

Images: Shutterstock, Alamy

POETS' CORNER

SPRING 1945

It was the spring of '45
(the nineteen hundred one, ye ken),
A glorious time to be alive
And I was almost fifteen then.
So much to see, so much to do
And all the world in which to move.
I'd never smelled such air, and you
Were in the future then, my love.
Tho' this is past these many years
And time has worn me down, ye ken,
The foggy weight of mem'ry clears
And I become a lad again.

R.L. SYKES

THIS DAY

Do I feel more than a tinge of guilt,
As I languish in my garden that nature has built,
Savouring sweet scents of hyacinths blue,
Caressing my nostrils with senses anew?

A lifetime of toil to save and to hoard,
Now I sit back here and reap my reward.
Drinking the warmth of this soft springtime noon,
I reflect on the years gone by, all too soon,

And resolve to enjoy this beautiful pleasure,
That simply doesn't have a monetary measure.
Left far behind is the rat-race sewer;
Their money is more, but their pleasures are fewer.

When did they last hear the drone of a bee
Or see a cobweb of fine filigree,
Sparkling like diamonds in the morn's remnant dew,
Or watch pure white clouds float by in the blue?

Up, up, my heart drifts away
And long may I savour these moments – this day.

AVRIL MOIR

THE WRITE OFF

What ever happened to social letters?
They've been consigned to the bin of progress;
Like cheques and coins, they have slipped
Quietly away.
I do miss them, I must confess.

They have been replaced by texts and emails,
Efficient but never the same.
Pen pals, too, are a thing of the past –
I think it is all a shame.

There was an art to letter writing,
With calligraphy taught to most when they were schooled,
Thin up . . . thick down . . . strokes of the pen,
On a blue marbled pad, every line and margin
Faintly ruled.

It required thought and concentration to compose
A social letter;
They took time and dedication to write.
To receive one from a distant friend
Was nothing less than a sheer delight.

Telegrams were for urgent news;
The writing pad preferred by those you held dear,
And to those friends and relatives
From whom you would long to hear.

The airmail, on blue wings,
Was not just long distance "snail mail";
It was delivered at quite a reasonable speed,
Although not at the rate of cold electronic messages,
This I must concede.

I had a card from my Uncle Ronnie,
In which he asked if I was OK.
He lives in Manjimup, Australia – a long
Long way away.

I wanted to let him know that I am well
And to have my best wishes conveyed.
I thought that I would write him a letter,
But I couldn't find the pad and envelopes;
They seem to have been permanently mislaid!
"I sent him an EMAIL!"

LES POWELL

Have you been writing poetry for many years or are you a new, budding poet? If the answer is "yes" and you would like others to read your work, please write to us at: **"Poets' Corner", This England Magazine, 185 Fleet Street, London, EC4A 2HS** or email **editor@thisengland.co.uk**

Poet of the Past

Wilfred Owen

I GO out of this year a Poet, my dear Mother, as which I did not enter it."

It was late 1917, a momentous year for Wilfred Owen, in which he'd composed many of the poems that would bring posthumous fame. It's astonishing to realise that Owen, now considered one of the great war poets, only had a handful of poems published before his death in 1918 and was largely unknown.

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born in 1893 in Oswestry on the Welsh borders and was brought up in Birkenhead and Shrewsbury. He discovered poetry early, a keen disciple of Keats with whom he shared a delight in sensuous language. He was also a fervent Anglican, encouraged by his devout mother to whom he was close.

He worked as a pupil-teacher in Shrewsbury, then as a lay assistant to the vicar of Dunsden, a time that began eroding his faith – something later consolidated by war. Owen subsequently became a tutor in Bordeaux, and decided his future would be one of artistic endeavour, specifically: "the fullest, largest, liveable life was that of a Poet."

But war would confound his plans, as it did for so many. Owen returned home by late 1915, enlisted and was sent to the Western Front in 1916, fighting on the Somme. Initially patriotic, it wasn't until experiencing the stark realities of trench warfare that his attitude dramatically shifted. First he fell down a hole, suffering concussion, then severe shell-shock took him out of action and into the safer haven in June 1917 of Craiglockhart, the convalescent home in Edinburgh for men suffering from "neurasthenia".

It was here (where Owen would publish in *The Hydra* magazine) that he'd experience an "annus mirabilis", a year of profound creative serendipity. Made to confront haunting nightmares by his physician and finding poetic kinship with his hero, the celebrated poet Siegfried Sassoon, Owen's distinctive style was born, fusing Sassoon's courageous realism and his own romantic sensibility – a poetic synthesis both intensely poignant and vividly descriptive.

Sassoon initially underestimated Owen, but everything changed after he saw the embryonic *Anthem For Doomed Youth*, realising: "My little friend was much more than the promising minor poet I'd judged him . . . His verse, with its sumptuous epithets and large-scale imagery, noble naturalness and depth of meaning, had impressive affinities with Keats. This new sonnet was a revelation." After Craiglockhart, Owen wrote gratefully to Sassoon: "And you have fixed my Life – however short. You did not light me: I was always a mad comet; but you have fixed me."

In *Anthem For Doomed Youth,* Wilfred Owen revitalised the sonnet form, employing his characteristic use of assonance and alliteration ("stuttering rifles' rapid rattle") with pararhyme [half rhyme, vowel variation within the same consonant pattern], which he would also use mesmerisingly in *Strange Meeting*, one of his most accomplished poems, where, after death, the author meets the soldier he killed:

And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,

– By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

Owen was the first to use pararhyme so assiduously, its deployment jarring and intentionally unsettling. His greatest poetry was meant to enlighten those in England about the true futility of war and to warn future generations. In his famous preface for the book of poems being planned in 1918, he wrote: "Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity."

Philip Larkin later described him as "an original, unforgettable poet . . . the spokesman of a deep and unaffected compassion", as Owen's *Dulce et Decorum est* exemplifies. Here, based on experience, Owen shows how, contrary to popular assumption of the era, that it was not noble to perish, but a sheer waste, as he chronicles the vile after-effects of a gas attack, culminating in the admonishment that, if witnessed:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.

Tragically, sent back rehabilitated to the Front in late 1918, Owen would perish on 4 November, just one week before the Armistice. Sassoon and Edmund Blunden did much to champion his growing post-war reputation, something that's risen exponentially over the passage of time.

As Dylan Thomas perceptively said, with his incisiveness and acute imaginative sympathy, Owen remains "a poet of all times, all places, and all wars. There is only one war: that of men against men."

AMANDA HODGES

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH (an excerpt)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

Images: Shutterstock

EMMA MANNERS

The Duchess of Rutland discusses Englishness, life at Belvoir Castle and what inspired her to write a book about the previous duchesses

The Duchess in her garden

Your book describes your life in Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, and the lives of the women who lived there before you. When did the castle first become your home?
I first moved into the castle in 2001, nearly a year after the death of my father-in-law, the 10th Duke of Rutland. I had previously been living in a beautiful farmhouse on the estate while I was running my outdoor furniture company from one of the outbuildings.

What were your first impressions of living there?
It was just absolutely spellbinding. I remember first driving through Woolsthorpe by Belvoir and up the tree lined road and you see this fairy-tale castle perched on top of the hill. It looks like a castle from a story.

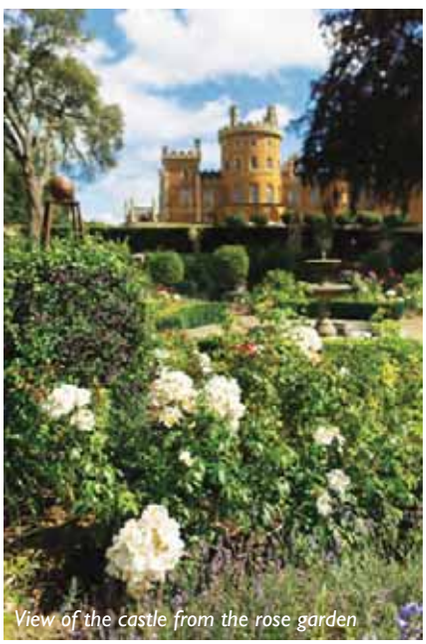
How do you feel about it now?
I still feel exactly the same! No matter how many times I drive up that hill, I still pinch myself to check it's all real.

What first inspired you to delve into the history of Belvoir and the women who lived there?
Living in the castle, you are all too aware that the women who came before you are all around. Their portraits watch over you as you walk through the labyrinth of corridors. You are living in their history and their footsteps and you cannot help but be in awe of them and all that they did for the castle.

How did you go about doing your research? Was there a source you found particularly useful?
Our archives proved to be an invaluable source of information – it was like opening a Pandora's Box of surprises! We are so lucky here at Belvoir that our archives are so extensive and hold such a detailed history of the castle, those who lived here and what life was like for them.

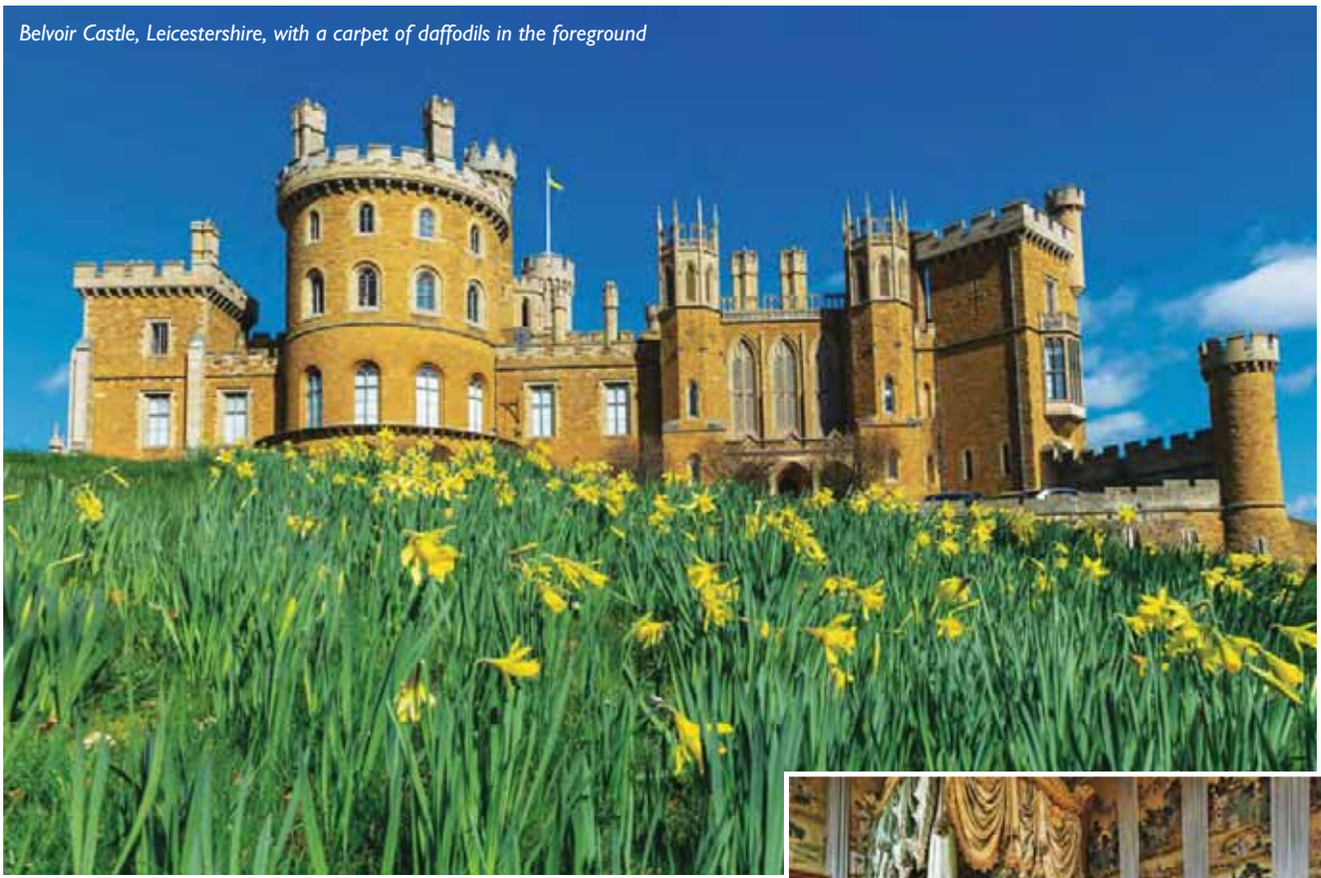
What would you pick out as the outstanding achievements of some of those women?
Elizabeth, the 5th Duchess, building Belvoir Castle as we know it today over 25 years, starting when she was only 21 years of age. When she first arrived from Castle Howard, she was used to the finer things in life. So when she saw the third castle – more of a fortified manor house made from green timber – she persuaded her husband to raze it to the ground and build the Belvoir that we know and love today.

Do you have a favourite among the women, or is there someone you particularly relate to? Why have you chosen this person?
Elizabeth (5th Duchess) and Violet (8th Duchess), they were both such strong women and leaders in their time. Both were passionate and active in their love and work to better the estate, all while raising a family of their own.


View of the castle from the rose garden

Elizabeth, 5th Duchess of Rutland

What was your most surprising discovery?
Lancelot "Capability" Brown's garden plans – they were in a drawer in the archives that no one had ever thought to check before. This kick-started the



Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, with a carpet of daffodils in the foreground

The castle's Chinese bedroom

restoration of the estate to achieve what Capability Brown had planned, 200 years ago.

Are there any characteristics that you would say unite these remarkable women?
They are single minded and determined. Their passion and love for the estate was clearly demonstrated in how they worked to maintain Belvoir so that it could be appreciated by future generations.

What would you say have been the greatest changes in terms of how you live in the castle today compared to the experiences of the women before you?
Previous duchesses would have had the entire castle at their disposal, however I live out of our family kitchen and sitting room. In the past, they would never have had to share their home with the public nearly every day of the year! It is so important for me that I can close the door and have my own private space for me and my family.

What's your favourite thing about life in the castle?
The views are simply breath-taking. Sometimes when I need some quiet time, I go up to the roof to look at the parkland and surrounding countryside.

What brilliant invention would most enhance your life there?
The light switch – many areas of the castle get so dark that you can barely see one meter in front of you!

Apart from Belvoir Castle, where is your favourite spot in England and why?
Radnorshire forest – it will always hold a special place in my heart as where I grew up and where I love to return to my roots every year to go riding with dear friends and family.

What's your favourite way to spend a Sunday?
Cooking my family a Sunday lunch and then going to church.

If you were to sum up England in just three words, what would they be?
Heritage, homeland, harmony.

What for you are the best things about this country?
Our countryside; it is just so quintessentially English and we need to protect it at all costs.

What, in your opinion, is Queen Elizabeth II's most important legacy?
Duty to her role and to her faith.

Now the book is finished, what do you have planned next?
Carry on as usual!

The Accidental Duchess by Emma Manners, Duchess of Rutland, is out now.
(Pan Macmillan, £22; ISBN: 978-1-03500-207-8)

Images: Neil Hoyle, Pete Walton, courtesy of Duchess of Rutland

GARDENER'S NOTES

BY JULIET ROBERTS

For gardeners, spring is the season of promise. All the lessons learned from previous years, all the seeds and bulbs bought in autumn, all the planning over winter have the potential to make your garden better than ever this year. One of the best aspects of gardening is the wonderful sense of optimism, so here are some of my recommendations for plants and inspiring places to visit to help your garden flourish.

> **"Gardens are the result of a collaboration between art and nature"**
>
> *Penelope Hobhouse*

LONG-FLOWERING SUMMER PERENNIALS

Four exceptionally good plants to bring colour, texture and seasonal interest to your garden each spring

MATHIASELLA BUPLEUROIDES 'GREEN DREAM'

An unusual perennial with large umbels of jade green bracts held on tall pink stems. Flowers April-June. Likes moist, well-drained soil in sun or part shade. May need winter protection. Height 100cm.

CLEMATIS ARMANDII 'APPLE BLOSSOM'

This vigorous, wonderfully scented clematis produces masses of white flowers with a pink flush in early spring. Evergreen. Height 5m.

MATTEUCCIA STRUTHIOPTERIS

A deciduous fern whose spectacular bright-green fronds emerge in spring, unfurling slowing into their shuttlecock shape. Likes damp shade. Height 1.5m.

TULIPA 'CARNAVAL DE NICE'

A very jolly, late-flowering double tulip with a dense ruff of white petals with bright raspberry red streaks. Height 40cm.

LOOK OUT FOR

A tool, a book and a useful bit of kit

DEWIT BROADFORK

A traditional agricultural digging tool that originated in France, a broadfork (also called a grelinette) is a great way of loosening soil without damaging its structure. Simple but effective. *crocus.co.uk, £94.99.*

HUSBANDRY BY ISABEL BANNERMAN

An insightful little book in which renowned garden designer Isabel Bannerman reflects on the numerous remarkable gardens she and husband Julian have created for themselves and clients over the years. *pimpernelpress.com, £14.99.*

RUBBER SEED TRAY

Perfect for ecologically minded gardeners, these seed trays are made from ethically sourced natural rubber and, unlike their plastic counterparts, are designed to last. They measure 32 x 25 x 5cm. *budtoseed.co.uk, £19.95.*

BLICKLING ESTATE, NORFOLK

Blickling is thought to be the birthplace of Anne Boleyn, though a Jacobean hall now stands in the place of the Tudor house where she and her family lived. Set within 5,000 acres of parkland, the gardens cover 55 acres with formal and informal areas, including a kitchen garden, parterres, topiary, 18th-century yew hedging and specimen trees. Designed for year-round interest, the gardens are particularly good in spring with extensive plantings of daffodils and bluebells. *nationaltrust.org.uk*

KILLERTON, DEVON

This 10-hectare hillside garden belongs to an imposing 18th-century house with magnificent views over Dartmoor. Set within a parkland of around 100 hectares, the garden boasts a famous arboretum where many rare trees and shrubs were introduced by legendary Exeter plantsman John Veitch. The pleasure grounds nearer the house feature a terrace designed in 1900 by William Robinson, who was a leading proponent of wild gardening. *nationaltrust.org.uk*

SISSINGHURST, KENT

The gardens at Sissinghurst Castle are believed to be among the most beautiful in the world. Most people go the in summer, but it's worth visiting in spring, as there's so much to learn from the richly layered planting and, importantly, the gardens are less busy. Head for the Lime Walk, the Nuttery and the newly developed Delos garden developed by designer Dan Pearson along with head gardener Troy Scott Smith. *nationaltrust.org.uk*

SIZERGH CASTLE, CUMBRIA

Sizergh Castle, built in the Middle Ages, has been home to the Strickland family for over 750 years. The marvellous Grade II listed gardens feature a kitchen garden, formal terraces, lakes, wildflower meadows, a stumpery, a woodland garden, an orchard and a limestone rock garden, home to a collection of hardy ferns. *nationaltrust.org.uk*

Images: National Trust/Malcolm Jarvis and Paul Bailey, Alamy, Shutterstock

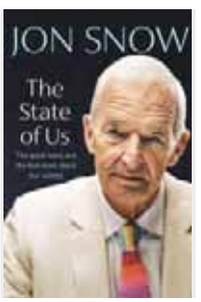
THE BOOKSHELF

Take your pick from a plethora of Royal-themed titles this spring, many in tribute to her late Majesty

SPARE

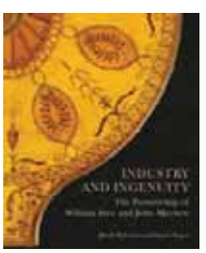
Prince Harry's memoir takes us back to one of the most searing images of the 20th century: two young boys, two princes, walking behind their mother's coffin as the world looked on. It is from this point onwards that Harry shares how his life has played out. The anticipation surrounding this book and its global publication in 16 languages says much about the continued maelstrom surrounding Harry and Meghan, this the most recent instalment after Oprah and Netflix. It may leave you wondering how many times they can bang the same drum. Since the Queen's passing, which marked a lifetime of unflinching service, even the most empathetic amongst us are tiring of the couple, though the vitriol in the media has been shocking. The infamous family saga undoubtedly represents a pertinent debate: do we celebrate the stiff upper lip of old or do we openly share our struggles, which studies have shown is so good for our mental health? Whether Harry in his own words will make anyone change their entrenched positions remains to be seen.
Transworld, £28; ISBN: 978-0-85750-479-1

THE STATE OF US



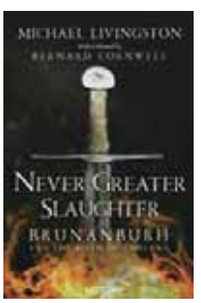
Out in March, this book from Jon Snow reflects on how our nation has changed during his five decade career in the media. Drawing on a wealth of knowledge accumulated from a career interviewing a wide range of people, including every Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher, he stresses that inequality and an unwillingness to confront it are at the heart of society's problems today. Despite these challenges, Snow also outlines the profound social progress he has witnessed.
Bantam Press, £20; ISBN: 978-1-78763-570-8

INDUSTRY AND INGENUITY



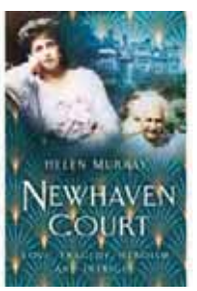
The partnership of William Ince and John Mayhew from 1758-1804 was one of the most famous in Georgian London's cabinetmaking community. Despite their impressive reputation, much of their work has remained unidentified until now. Enjoy the beauty of their craftmanship with this book, featuring over 500 illustrations of their creations, many of which are previously unpublished. *Philip Wilson Publishers, £75; ISBN: 978-1-78130-109-8*

NEVER GREATER SLAUGHTER



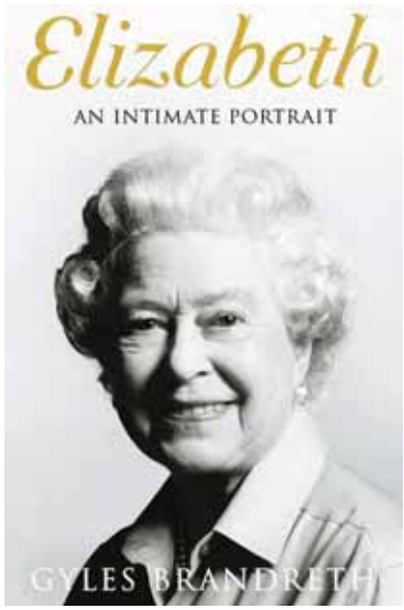
Now out in paperback, this fascinating read from Dr Michael Livingston delves into the dramatic Battle of Brunanburh, fought in the north-west in AD 937. One of the most significant conflicts in the history of the British Isles, the battle saw Athelstan, King of England, secure England's future as an independent, unified kingdom. Enjoy expert commentary on this crucial battle.
Osprey, £10.99; ISBN: 978-1-47284-937-3

NEWHAVEN COURT



Built in 1884 for the Locker-Lampson family, Newhaven Court played host to a range of eminent figures during its 80-year life. From Lord Tennyson to Sir Ernest Shackleton, Winston Churchill to Kate Greenaway, the house saw poets rub shoulders with politicians, and plenty of drama. Read the story of this remarkable house, written by Helen Murray of the Norfolk Museums Service.
The History Press, £17.99; ISBN: 978-1-80399-107-8

ELIZABETH: AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT



From many meetings with her throughout his life, and through a close friendship with Prince Philip, Gyles Brandeth became well acquainted with the late Queen Elizabeth II and the wider Royal Family. Having kept a record of each and every one of the encounters over a number of years in his diaries, he paints a vivid picture of the Queen in this biography.

Brandeth walks readers through the Queen's younger years, outlining her unwavering commitment to her country from the day she became Queen aged just 25, right up to the last days of her life. However, this is not just any biography, with Brandeth's close relationship with the Royal Family providing rich colour and intimate details about the Queen's life.

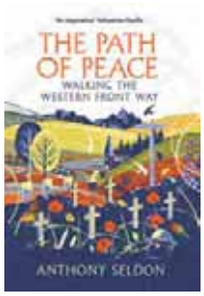
From the comfort she found in watching BBC crime drama *Line of Duty* with her Master of Household, Sir Tony Johnstone-Burt, after Prince Philip's death, to her spirited sense of humour, her relationship with the Sussexes (far smoother than the media would have you believe), to her thoughts on Prince Andrew, in whom she allegedly never lost confidence. And, perhaps most shockingly, claims that she was battling cancer in the last year or so of her life.

On social media, Brandeth has claimed that this book is his attempt to "both tell her story and discover how she became the very special person that she was. Who was she? What was she really like? And why was she the exceptional person she was?"

Don't miss this trusted account of the incredible life of the most famous and arguably best-loved Head of State on Earth.

Michael Joseph, £25; ISBN: 978-0-24158-258-9

THE PATH OF PEACE

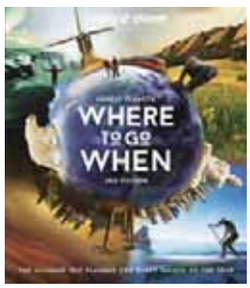


Follow Anthony Seldon's incredible journey along the "path of peace". During World War I, British soldier Alexander Douglas Gillespie had a dream to create a "Via Sacra" that people across Europe could walk to honour those who had fallen in conflict. However, he lost his own life in action and his dream was never realised.

When Anthony Seldon discovered this unfinished project, he was determined to make it happen. Finding himself at a crossroads in life, Seldon set out on the 1,000 kilometre route from the French-Swiss border to the English Channel. Tracing the historic route of the Western Front, this passes through a variety of gorgeous landscapes and evocative scenery, including the haunting trenches of Arras, the Somme and Ypres. Join Seldon on this journey as he searches for inner peace and renewed purpose.

Atlantic Books, £20; ISBN: 978-1-83895-740-7

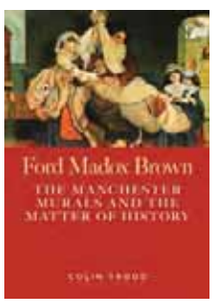
WHERE TO GO WHEN



Planning your travels for the year ahead? Out now in hardback, this Lonely Planet guide outlines exactly what it says on the cover: where to go when. Make the most of the world's best destinations by visiting them when they are busy with events, when the weather is ideal for exploring and when natural landscapes are at their very best. From the French Riviera in February for its renowned Lemon Festival, to Exmoor National Park in October for its Dark Skies Festival, discover far-flung destinations and those closer to home.

Lonely Planet, £19.99; ISBN: 978-1-83869-504-0

FORD MADOX BROWN



Manchester town hall's murals have been labelled some of the most important public artworks of their day. Depicting the history of the city, they have since been largely forgotten. Senior art history lecturer Dr Colin Trodd has now penned the first in-depth account of these murals, examining how each artwork has contributed to a radical vision of social and cultural life. *Manchester University Press, £80; ISBN: 978-1-52614-243-6*

THE QUEEN: 70 YEARS OF MAJESTIC STYLE

There's no need to be a fashionista to appreciate this book brimming with stunning photographs of Her Majesty throughout her life. Bethan Holt goes deeper than simply showing us how her classic style evolved, be it on tour or off duty, revealing aspects of the Queen's character, too. No designer told her what to wear – she called the shots – and she never dismissed clothes as frivolous, knowing power lay in her appearance. *Ryland Peters & Small, £18.99; ISBN: 978-1-78879-427-5*

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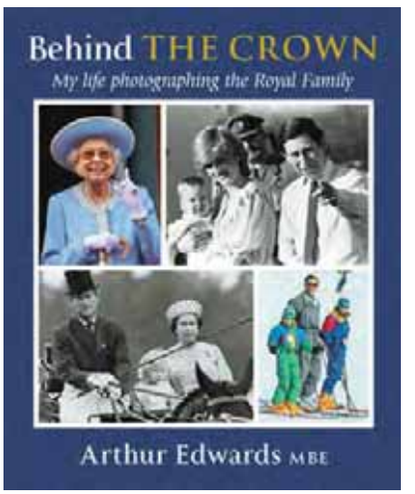
BEHIND THE CROWN



While the late Queen Elizabeth devoted a lifetime to our service, Arthur Edwards MBE has spent his photographing the Royal Family for *The Sun*. "I'm there when they emerge from the maternity wing as wailing newborns, and I'm there again when they marry before a joyous nation. And when they're laid to rest . . . I'm on hand to capture history being made." Last September, he was there waiting in Westminster Abbey.

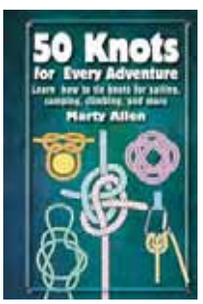
His role has seen him cover more than 200 royal tours in over 120 countries, and in doing so build a rapport with the royals. Many know him by his first name, he has received cards and gifts from His Majesty on birthdays, and even enjoyed a dance with our Queen Consort: "We should go on *Strictly Come Dancing*, but don't tell my husband," she quipped.

Edwards is candid about all "the hiccups along the way", too, which adds much humour, such as when our then heir to the throne attempted to bellow him off a public footpath – "What are you doing on my land?" – and wryly reprimanded Edwards for taking a photo of his bald spot that was splashed on the front page of *The Sun* with the headline "There's a patch in your thatch!"

Chapters are dedicated to each family member, creating a fascinating visual reel of past to present, with captions adding both historical interest and personal insight. It is perhaps the image of Prince William as a toddler surrounded by press and inspecting a camera lens that best sums up his book, though – a product of the inevitable and inextricable relationship that exists between the family and the media.

HarperCollins, £25; ISBN: 978-0-00858-112-1

50 KNOTS



All good Boy Scouts know their reef knot from their bowline, but as our salad days are behind us you might just be after a little reminder – especially if it's up to you to teach the grandchildren. Enthusiast Marty Allen's book includes lots of handy illustrations to make even a tricky Australian braid knot come together, and categories cover everything from knots for adventures at sea, climbing or even just around the home. A brief introduction explains basic terminology so no one will muddle their standing end from their working end, as well as the different knot types. All this is handy to know, but working out each one is good for the old braincells, too – "Think of each knot as a small puzzle. First, you must work out how all of the pieces fit together," advises Allen. Don't despair if some elude you. After all, "unless you are dangling from a precipice, there is no rush."

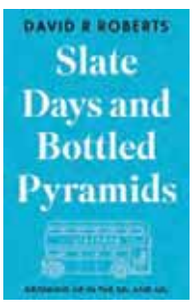
Dog'n'Bone, £9.99; ISBN: 978-1-91298-361-2

LITERARY CATS

Discover some paw prints in the most unexpected of places as writers Judith Robinson and Scott Pack reveal the imprint cats have made on the literary world throughout the centuries. You'll encounter the famous cat Puss in Boots, explore Edgar Allan Poe's undeniable fondness for felines and see how Dickens uses cats as a metaphor. With a chapter on poetry, the book is a super way to reaquaint yourself with myriad great verse as well as classic novels. For cat owners, it might just make you look at your feline friend in a new light – could they inspire the next literary bestseller?

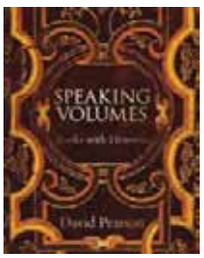
Bodleian Library, £16.99; ISBN: 978-1-85124-573-4

SLATE DAYS



. . . and Bottled Pyramids is a charming collection of vignettes on growing up in the 1950s and '60s. David R. Roberts takes a wry and nostalgic tone sharing stories such as trying to free a trapped foot from his tricycle "with gritted milk teeth", along with the trials of wearing socks that are at least a size too big so "I can grow into them." He hopes such memories of older generations will contribute to hope for the future. *Book Guild, £8.99; ISBN: 978-1-91535-215-6*

SPEAKING VOLUMES



Join David Pearson on this quest into our most treasured books, asking why it is that they still matter. On the way you'll walk the halls of the Bodleian's 15th-century Duke Humfrey's Library, explore books damaged by bullets or graffiti, and see what can be learned from annotations – not least those of Philip Larkin, who was clearly no fan of *The Faerie Queen*, describing it as "the dullest thing . . . Blast it!"

Bodleian Library, £40; ISBN: 978-1-85124-562-8

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SPRING DIARY

FEBRUARY

Ad Gefrin

Opening this February, Ad Gefrin is an exciting new cultural experience which curates rare and never-before-seen objects telling the story of an Anglo-Saxon Royal Court and the lives that defined the Golden Age of Northumbria.

Opens February. Ad Gefrin, South Road, Wooler NE71 6NJ. 01668 281554; adgefrin.co.uk

Dark Skies Festivals

Celebrate the wonder of our galaxy at this year's Dark Skies Festivals. Enjoy a range of events including star parties and talks from experts across various locations.

South Downs, 4-17 Feb. North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales, 10-26 Feb. darkskiesnationalparks.org.uk

Deep Sea Dive

RHS Garden Wisley is staging a houseplant takeover with a deep sea theme, which will see its glasshouse covered in hundreds of plants over deep sea surfaces.

4 Feb-12 Mar. RHS Garden Wisley Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. 01483 224234; rhs.org.uk

I Grew Up 80s

Explore 1980s Britain through the eyes of a child of the decade with this exhibition revisiting its colourful popular culture. With over 200 treasures from the '80s, immerse yourself in Betamax, BMX, *Dirty Dancing*, Donkey Kong and more.

Until 26 Feb. Dorset Museum, High West St, Dorchester DT1 1XA. 01305 262735; dorsetmuseum.org

Northumberland's new Anglo-Saxon experience

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham: Paths to Abstraction

Enjoy the early works of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, ranging from Cornish landscapes to abstract canvases from the 1960s and '70s.

11 Feb-20 May. Hatton Gallery, King's Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU. 0191 277 8877; hattongallery.org.uk

MARCH

The Van de Veldes: Greenwich, Art and the Sea

The Queen's House, Greenwich, is hosting a new exhibition on the founders of English marine painting, 350 years after their arrival in England. Includes newly conserved painting *A Royal Visit to the Fleet*, which was worked on in the Queen's House studio in the 17th century.

2 March 2023 – 14 Jan 2024. National Maritime Museum, Romney Rd, London SE10 9NF. 020 8858 4422; rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum

Yorkshire Yarn Fest

Enjoy a weekend of all things craft, with social events, a marketplace of vendors and a variety of workshops. Whether you're a craft expert or a rookie, all are welcome.

4-5 March. Sandburn Hall, Scotchman Lane, Flaxton, York YO60 7RG. yorkshireyarnfest.com

Saint Piran's Day

Head to Newquay to celebrate Saint Piran's Day with a lively parade through the town led by a Cornish piper, the Gorsedd's Grand Bard and the Newquay Old Cornwall Society.

5 Mar. Newquay Town Centre TR7 1DB. 01637 817 547; newquay.co.uk

The Boat Race on the River Thames

Empowering Art

This ground-breaking exhibition brings together a range of rarely seen historical and contemporary artworks created by indigenous artists from across the north-west coast of North America.

12 Mar-30 Jul. Sainsbury Centre, Norfolk Rd, Norwich NR4 7TJ. 01603 593199; sainsburycentre.ac.uk

The Hallé in Sheffield

Performed by British tenor Christopher Turner, enjoy The Hallé's range of instantly recognisable melodies from the worlds of opera, the concert hall and the big screen.

17 March. Sheffield City Hall, Barker's Pool, Sheffield S1 2JA. 0114 256 5593; sheffieldcityhall.co.uk

The Boat Race

The annual Cambridge-Oxford Boat Race is always a thrill. This year the universities go head to head in the 178th Men's Boat Race and the 77th Women's Boat Race. Don't miss this historic occasion.

26 March. River Thames, Putney, London. theboatrace.org

APRIL

Joana Vasconcelos: Wedding Cake

See the spectacle of a 12-metre-high wedding cake at Waddesdon Manor. The wedding cake sculpture made from ceramic tiles was created by Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos.

Opens Apr. Waddesdon Manor, Waddesdon, Aylesbury HP18 0JH. 01296 820414; waddesdon.org.uk

To the Roar of the Crowd

Step back in time to an age of gladiator fights and chariot races with this exhibition of Roman objects which depict gladiators, charioteers and the rituals of the arena.

8 Apr-29 Oct. Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum, Buddle Street, Wallsend, Newcastle upon Tyne NE28 6HR. 0191 278 4217; segedunumromanfort.org.uk

The Grand National

Watched by more than 500 million people in over 140 countries, the Grand National is the racing event of the year. Book your tickets now to see 40 competitors take on Aintree's famous fences.

15 Apr. Aintree Racecourse, Ormskirk Rd, Aintree, Merseyside L9 5AS. 0344 579 3001; thejockeyclub.co.uk

Feast of Saint George

Join in this annual celebration of our patron saint in the heart of the capital. With everything from jousting to Morris dancing, live music and a variety of food and drink, this is the perfect way to honour Saint George.

23 Apr. Trafalgar Square, London. london.gov.uk

Todmorden Folk Festival

If you're a fan of folk, Todmorden is the place to be. This grassroots festival features Morris dancing, lots of live music, workshops and theatre taking place throughout Todmorden's historic buildings over the May bank holiday weekend.

The racing event of the year

SNOWDROPS IN SPRINGTIME

Alpine Garden Society Snowdrop Day

Tickets are required for this day of snowdrops, which includes lectures, plant sales, tea, coffee and lunch.

4 Feb. Ford Hall, Lilleshall National Conferencing Centre, Newport, Shropshire TF10 9AT. 01386 554790; alpinegardensociety.net

Shepton Snowdrops

Discover rare snowdrops and spring plants from local growers, arts and crafts by some of the West Country's best, workshops, walks and more.

13-19 Feb. Various venues around Shepton Mallet. 07710 252155; sheptonsnowdrops.org.uk

The Garden House

This annual festival transforms Yelverton's Garden House, Devon, with a sea of snowdrops. Enjoy over 350 species on display across 12 acres of garden.

13 Jan-12 Mar. The Garden House, Pound Rd, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton PL20 7LQ. 01822 854769; thegardenhouse.org.uk

Wentworth Woodhouse

See Wentworth Woodhouse's gorgeous gardens filled with delicate snowdrops, which have been nurtured by the house's gardeners for the past 20 years.

1-28 Feb. Wentworth, Rotherham S62 7TQ. 01226 351161; wentworthwoodhouse.org.uk

28-30 Apr. Todmorden Water Quarter, Calderdale, West Yorkshire. todfolkfest.co.uk

MAY

Saint Francis of Assisi

This National Gallery exhibition will be the first major UK exhibition to explore the life and legacy of Saint Francis of Assisi. Depicting his spiritual radicalism, his commitment to the poor, his love of nature and his striving for peace, we see how he remains relevant today.

6 May-30 Jul. The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square London WC2N 5DN. 020 7747 2885; nationalgallery.org.uk

RHS Malvern Spring Festival

Get into the spirit of spring with this renowned garden show set against the gorgeous backdrop of the Malvern Hills. Enjoy stunning displays, a floral marquee and plant arcades, be inspired by advice on offer from horticultural experts, and sample delicious local food throughout.

11-14 May. Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire WR13 6NW. 01684 584 900; threecounties.co.uk

Bridlington Kite Festival

Watch an impressive display of giant inflatable kites, enjoy street food stalls and, if you're feeling brave, have a go on the fairground rides at this much-loved local festival.

20-21 May. Sewerby Fields, Sewerby Road, Sewerby YO15 1ER. bridlingtonkitefestival.co.uk

Chelsea Flower Show

Touted as the floral equivalent of London Fashion Week, the famous Chelsea Flower Show attracts 150,000 visitors each year to see the latest horticultural trends.

23-27 May. London Gate, Royal Hospital Road, Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3 4SR. 0344 338 7501; rhs.org.uk

Images: Shutterstock, Sally Ann Norman

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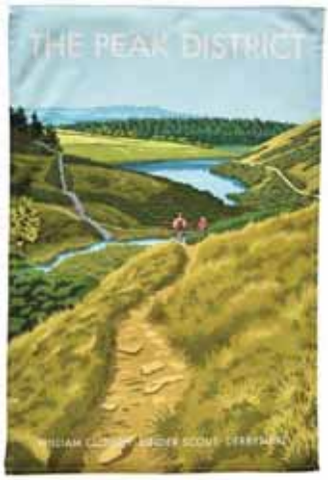

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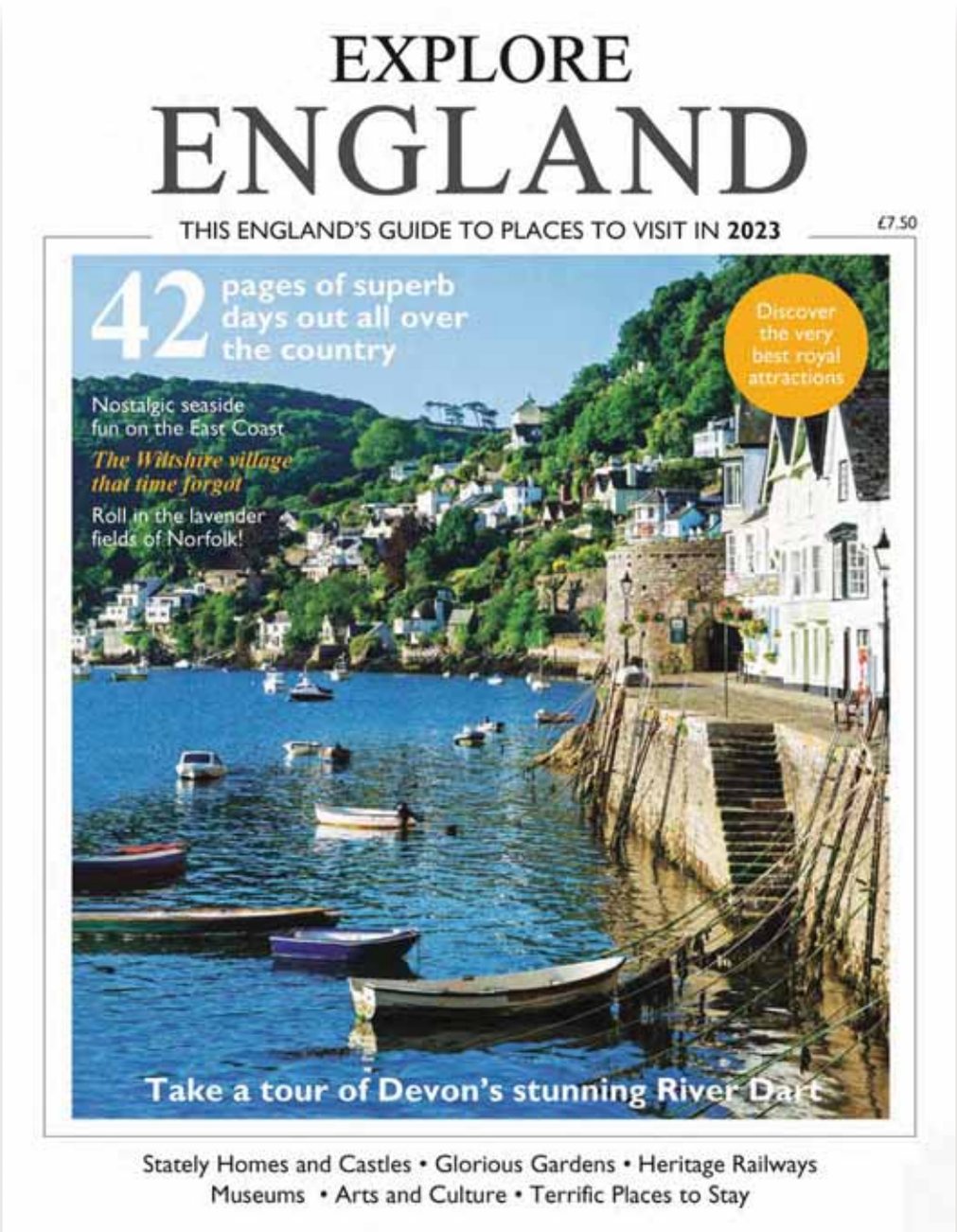
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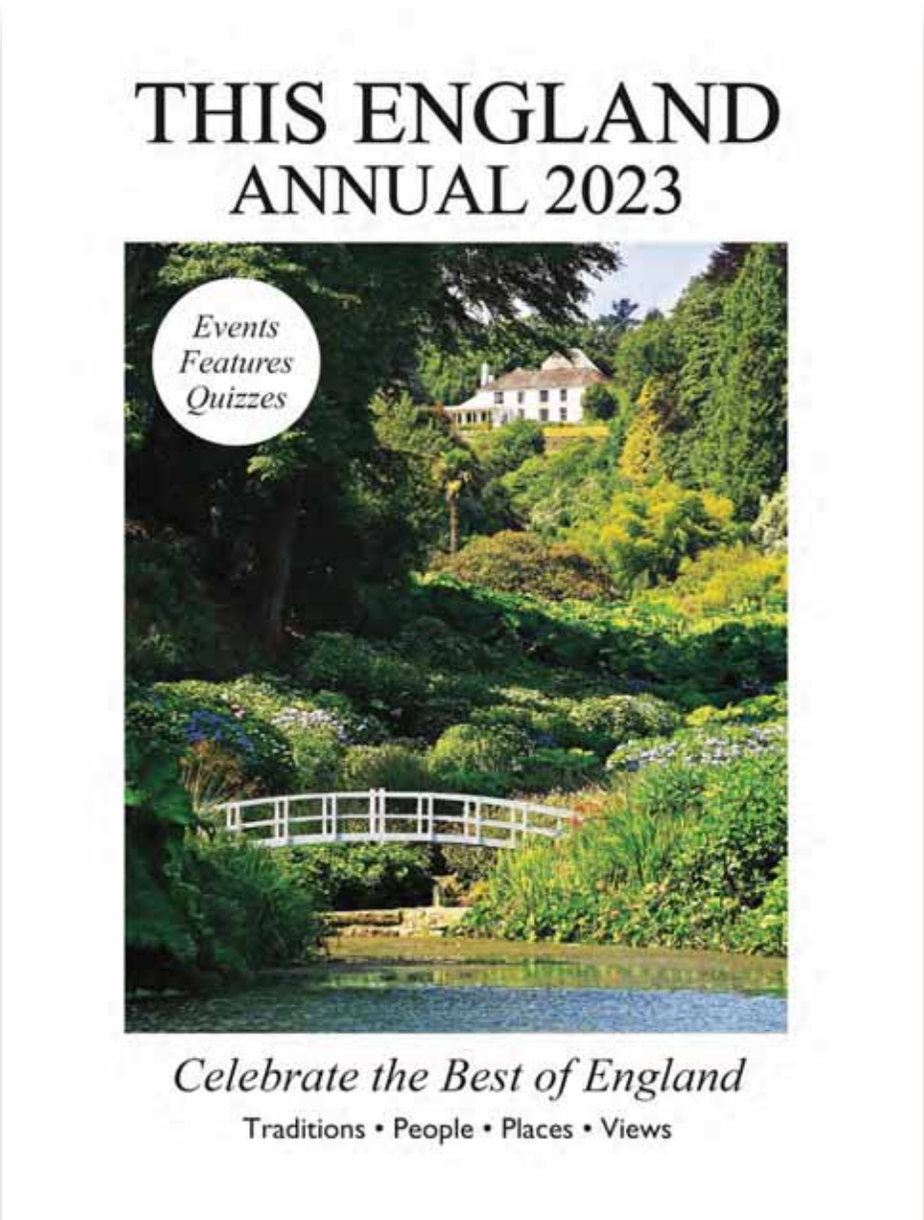

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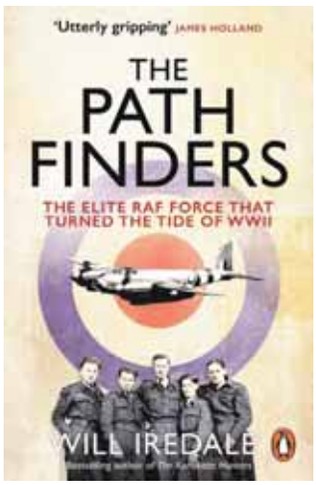

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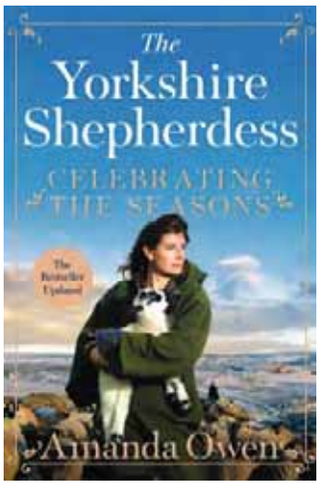

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LATE THAW

By David Fleming

I heard the trees a-dripping; the thaw was close at hand,
The cold and frost unfastening their grip upon the land,
And quietly, oh, so quietly, the whisper of a spring;
A seedling stirred beneath the earth, a bird half-thought to sing.
Where endless snow had filled the field I saw a patch of green,
And in the darkest woodland haunt, the sun stretched forth a beam.
I loosed a button of my coat and gladly took my way
To feel the warmth and see the light of this new April day.

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